

IN
THE
CAMARGUE

EMILY
BOWLES

\$27⁵⁰

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(novel)



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IN THE CAMARGUE.

BY

EMILY BOWLES.

“ There shall never be one lost good! what was, shall live as before ;
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound ;
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more ;
On the earth the broken arcs ; in the heaven a perfect round.”

BROWNING.

LONDON :

SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15, WATERLOO PLACE.

1873.

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PRINTED BY WILLIAM MOORE AND CO.,
CAXTON WORKS.

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IN THE CAMARGUE.

CHAPTER I.

WHERE IS IT?

VERY early dawn, lighting up with slant rays a strange landscape, apparently some African desert of level sand, glittering with small shining particles like beads, and studded with the golden stars of a particular kind of aster. The stagnant waters of a vast salt lake gleam under the morning rays like a sheet of oil, and the dawn has awakened a vast multitude of sea-birds, cranes, wild-ducks, and flamingoes, which are diving and splashing with mournful cries in the passive water and enormous masses of reeds which hedge the banks. Afar off—and it is the only relief to the sad coloured monotony of the scene—is a wood of Aleppo pines, whose umbrella heads and rich massive green are a positive refreshment to the eye. Is it Asia, Africa, or part of some trans-oceanic world ?

Only the south of France—"Sunny Provence," lovely Languedoc, by poetical license.

Between the pine wood and the lake lay a sort of farm. Ash-coloured buildings roofed with reeds, and crusted with the small floating moss which the damp *mistral* generates, contained a few rooms in which the really wealthy owner lived with his mother and daughter—he was a widower of many years—in what he considered great comfort and respectability. Around his tumbledown house, tumbledown fences enclosed a fine orchard of mulberry and almond trees, besides rich crops of rye, lucerne, and barley, with a quantity of vegetables. Long stacks of bees also showed that honey was a plentiful article of food; and a large out-house, stacked in the usual manner with divisions and partition-walls of brushwood, sounded to the ear of the passer-by like a gigantic watchmaker's shop, from the multitude of silkworms now spinning their cocoons. The farm consisted of a large kitchen, with the marmite, which was the usual sitting-room, a second rough kitchen or scullery where the dirty work was done, and an outroom in which fuel of driftwood, dried cattle-dung (*bouse* *), and a little pine were stored, as well as the various tools and implements used on the farm.

Beyond this was a rough wattled fowl-house, and a large flat pool for ducks, whose inmates and frequenters

* The *bouse* is dried and used in the Crau and Camargue as fuel, exactly as among the Arabs.

were now clucking and quacking at the height of their powers. Perhaps it was in obedience to their loud summons and appeal for freedom that a door opened at the bottom of a staircase leading to the three rooms above the kitchen, and a girl of about sixteen just glanced at the clumsy but trustworthy clock over the shelves adorned with crockery, and, taking a basket of refuse grain from a stand, went out and liberated the poultry, who instantly rushed, tumbling over each other, as if each of their lives hung upon being the foremost to catch the scattered grain on the ground.

While the happy creatures pecked, and scuttled, and fought over each separate barleycorn, the girl, who had at first smiled and looked interested as the fowls gathered about her, tame enough to jump up and catch the grain from her hand, now stood shading her eyes from the level sun rays, and looking intently across the sandy plain. Her smile vanished, and the expression of her face became intensely earnest, far-reaching, and sad.

It was a wonderful countenance for a girl of sixteen to possess. A pale, sensitively drawn face, with every nerve and muscle as fine as those of a highbred Arab, a delicate nose, slightly dilated at the nostrils, the loveliest curved lips, and long, yellow-brown, thick-fringed eyes, surrounded with pale violet shadow—eyes like fathomless mountain pools now, soft with feeling and the most ignorantly innocent affection, but revealing a volcano of Provençal passion, a lava compounded of

those strange Greek and Saracen elements not easily to be described or kept within bounds. Woe be to the man who should stir it in its depths, and to the day when it should be stirred. With the exception of the lips, there was not a particle of colour in Noël Privas's face, and the skin was almost Egyptian in its pale, clear brown. Her hair was very long, fine, and silky, dusk rather than purple black, and was plaited and wound in thick fillets round her exquisite head, so as to give the impression of her being crowned. Thin and brown and colourless it might be, but Noël Privas's face had a wonderful beauty of its own to eyes that were experienced and a mind that discerned.

“Noël! Noël!” called a harsh, loud voice from the stairs. “What are you doing, child? Is the kitchen swept and the marmite kindled?”

The girl started and turned towards the voice. “I have been feeding the fowls, grandmother. I am going to sweep the kitchen now.” She threw down the remainder of the grain, and hastened into the kitchen, tying on a coarse apron as she did so.

“Aye, aye! feeding the fowls!” said the same grating voice. “That takes a quarter of an hour to folk who want to idle, and five minutes to the hard working! But you are a good girl all the same.”

Noel did not seem specially impressed either by the scolding voice or the commendations; but humming to herself one of the mournful, minor airs, which, if they are really handed down from the troubadours, could

not have had a very cheering effect on those gentlemen's lives, she swept the kitchen trimly with a broom of long, fine rush, and with a handful of cattle-house and pine slips quickly kindled the marmite, and set on the pot to boil—a squat, but antique double-handled pot, which would have driven a pottery collector crazy till he had bargained for it and obtained. She had just done this, when the stair door was pushed open and an old woman, the owner of the grating voice, came in. Like all southern women of any age, she looked much older than she was ; and her brown, decided hook-nosed face might have been dried under the salt marsh suns for a century, for any evidence to the contrary, except that when she smiled—and it was a kindly, pleasant smile—her white, strong teeth were to be seen all sound. Paquette Privas was dressed in a full petticoat of olive-green stuff or cloth, with a deep orange handkerchief crossed in front and tied in a knot behind. The sleeves of her gown were dark brown, and the linen cap on her head had a small scarlet handkerchief tied over it. After looking in the pot to see in what stage the soup was, the old woman reached down her distaff from a corner cupboard of open shelves, and, taking a stool, sat down outside the door, under the projecting roof ledge, which sheltered her from the sun. Noël spread the table with plates and spoons, a yard or so of bread cut in portions, and a great wooden bowl of salad, dressed with a good deal of oil. Then she went to the doorway and

said, "Grandmother, shall I go out and call father now?"

"Where is he, child?"

"In the pine wood, Gran, talking to Rambert."

"Has Rambert brought his cattle to this *téradou*?"* asked the old woman, looking sharply at the girl, whose eyes were fixed upon the sand level, and did not observe her.

"Yes, Gran; I saw the bulls going across this morning at sunrise, with Oriflamme at their head, and then I saw father go out with Roi and Réne to the wood."

"Aye, aye! if the dogs were there, I'll warrant you could see fast enough. When I want you to spin a hank, then your eyes won't serve you, they ache so!"

"Gran," exclaimed the girl, laying one brown little hand on the old woman's shoulder, and smiling down at her, "the flax thread is fine and weak, and when it goes round and round it makes me giddy with watching it. Still I love the distaff, for certainly the holy Marys all used it, and spun with it the winding sheet of the Blessed Christ. But any eyes, even the blindest, could see Roi and Réne jumping and barking round my father. But you do like to scold me, don't you, Gran?"

"I like you to grow up handy and industrious, as a woman ought to be. Your mother was a good wife, Noël. She was not strong, nor country-like, but she was never idle. Weaving, spinning, knitting, and

* *Téradou*, the run where the cattle are pasturing.

patching—her little hands could do them all; and she sat there, so silent and yet so bright, that I never wondered your father did not marry again after she left him and went home. The salt-gatherers used to come round him, and talk to him about this woman and that, but he said his old mother could fill the pot, and kindle the marmite, and bring up the child. And also once he told me that, as Perlette could not bring you up herself, as she was gone to the Kingdom of God, he should like you to be brought up by the hand that fashioned her, and not by a strange woman who never saw her ways. And now go you, child, and call your father, but only tell him the soup is ready, and don't stay to chatter nor meddle with men's business."

The girl signed acquiescence with a graceful southern gesture, and sped across the broad white tract of sand that separated the farm from the massive pines. Like "fleet Camilla," Noël scarcely crushed the myriads of asters and stalks of sea lavender that studded the sands, and which were too familiar to attract her eye; but as she drew near the gnarled and twisted old pines, many a lovely wood-blossom excited her desire to stay and gather a wreath for the Madonna's image in the old kitchen which had now only yellow asters round its feet. But Noël remembered her grandmother's injunction, and she resolutely threaded her way through the grove, raising her voice to the peculiar, mournful

“O la !” used by the inhabitants of the district in calling to one another from the saltpans or canals.

A responsive call, not far off, answered her, and soon afterwards a violent rushing sound was heard, and two great cattle dogs—one white, with black points, the other tawny yellow—came bounding round her, barking in short, sharp, falsetto notes, and making every demonstration of joy.

“Dear dogs !” said Noël, trying to distribute her caresses equally between the eager creatures as they careered round her, now touching her shoulders, and then gently just reaching her face. “Roi, where is father ? Down, dear Réné, there’s a good dog ! Hi ! where is he ?”

They cantered forward, looking back, to show her the way, till she came within sight of two men sitting on a huge, fallen pine trunk, and talking so eagerly, that they did not see her till she was standing almost in front of them. Both the men then started, and one of them flushed red through his deeply bronzed skin.

“Father, the soup is boiling over, and will be quite spoilt. Gran will be put out if you do not come.”

“Aye, that she will, my girl,” answered the elder of the two men. “Grandams are worse than sweethearts or wives to harry or drive. Stay a moment, Noël, and I will come with you.”

“Gran forbade me to stay, dear father. Shall I take your wallet ?”

"Aye, do so! But come and speak to Rambert, Noël. Neighbourly words become neighbours, and Rambert will be our neighbour for one while, at least till the bulls and *vélels* (calves) have eaten up all the pasture on the *téradou*."

"Good day, Rambert," said the girl carelessly. "I hope your bulls will keep out of my way, for they frighten me so, I dare not come to the wood."

"They shall never frighten you where I am, Noël," replied the huge, bronzed cattle-guard eagerly, his rugged face lighting into a kind of rough beauty as he spoke. "You must get used to my herd, Noël, and they will follow you like your dogs. Look at Oriflamme now; he is as wise and docile as an elephant, and full as loving as Roi or Réné."

"Oh, I am not afraid of Oriflamme," said Noël, going close up to the gigantic ox with a bell round his neck, who was grazing close behind his master; "but then he is your *dondaire*,* and of course he is to be trusted." The huge creature turned his splendid eyes upon the girl as if to acknowledge her good opinion, and, while she gently pulled and smoothed his tufted forelock and crest, bent his head and its terrible out-curved horns towards her as if delighting in her touch.

"See how he knows you already!" exclaimed Ram-

* The leader of the herd or manade is called *dondaire*, and answers the purpose both of a sheep-dog and a *komker*, or trained elephant, to his herdsman.

bert with delight, looking at the pretty picture of brute force subdued by the slender maiden's hand. " You could tame Les Rochers himself, I know. Will you come and try some day ? "

" If Gran will let me, and father will bring me," replied Noël. " I should like to see Les Rochers ; I have heard that no one could ever conquer him or brand him with any mark but you."

" That is true, Noël ; but he is branded now. Come and see for yourself."

" Oh, but what will Gran say ? " cried Noël, with sudden remembrance, and, catching up her father's wallet, she made the hastiest, pretty little gesture of farewell to the herdsman, whose eyes were still riveted upon her, and calling the dogs, set off at a swift pace towards the farm.

" I must go too ; it is later than I thought," said Privas, collecting his tools into a heap, and throwing over them a sack. " Well, good day, Rambert ; keep up your heart, and remember that the child is young and tender yet, and must have her own time to settle her mind to marriage. I am your fast friend, as you know, and this matter of your uncle's legacy at Aigues Mortes sets all things straight in a housekeeping point of view. Good day."

And Nicole Privas strode away at such a pace, that he overtook his daughter before she had got to the middle of the sand plain.

" What were you and Rambert talking so earnestly

about?" she asked, as soon as they were walking side by side.

He pinched her brown cheek kindly and laughed.

"Why? What did you hear us say?"

"I did not hear anything except something about houses and gardens at Aigues Mortes, and you said it would do very well, and you were glad. Father, you are not going away from here to live in that dreadful, desolate old town?" and as Noël spoke she clutched him by the arm, and looked into his face as if to read his inmost heart.

Nicole laughed. "Live at Aigues Mortes! Why, child, the very words are impossible! One could only die behind those old turreted walls!"

"That is what I feel, father. Oh, I am glad to hear you say that! A dreadful fear flashed through me that you meant to make some change, and last week you said to me, 'Child, you can't expect to live here always, on the edge of the Valcaïres.* Why should I not always live in my own home, father?"

"Child, child! you run away with such notions. I never meant to go and live anywhere else. But girls do grow up and marry, you know, and then they go and make other homes for themselves."

"I shall never marry!" said Noël, withdrawing her arm from her father's, and walking on with a proud, light step.

* The great salt lake in the Camargue.

"*Pécâture!* What is in the wind now? Not a nunnery, I hope?"

"No, I shall never be a nun. I am not good enough," said Noël, as decisively as before.

"Well, well! you are good enough for me," said Nicole, with an instinctive feeling that there was always something folded up in the depths of Noël's eyes that he did not understand. "And now we will go in and see Gran, and eat our bread and soup."

CHAPTER II.

NOËL, AND WHAT SHE SHALL DO.

THE whole region of the Rhone deltas is so wild and singular, and so unlike everything we have been accustomed to associate with Provence, Languedoc, and the land of the troubadours and their songs, that it will be kinder to photograph it for the reader's benefit before carrying him forward further into the story of the lives just opened before him. The island of the Camargue,* formed by the main body of the Rhone, the Petit Rhone, and the Mediterranean, and containing the huge salt lake of the Valcaïres, besides smaller waters, is chiefly famous for the village (now) of Les Saintes Maries, the traditional resting place of St. Mary Salome, St. Mary the mother of St. James, and St. Mary Magdalene, who are traditionally said first to have evangelized the Camargue. The relics of the three Marys are still venerated there by a crowd of pilgrims every twenty-fifth of May. The island stretches without an interruption from Arles to the

* From *kamax*, reed, and *agros*, field.

coast, and is chiefly composed of mud banks, gravel beds, sand levels, and vast salt or brackish marshes, where at certain times of the year the most pestilential vapours and malaria abound. There are, however, artificially watered portions of the Camargue, where cultivation produces a variety of rich crops. The salt waters are kept out by dykes, as in Holland; the thick mud brought down by the Rhone is spread on the land; and the richness of the grass, corn, and green crops contrasts in the most singular manner with the general barrenness of the land.

On the barren wastes, which nearly swallow up the land portions of the island, salt is the sole melancholy production. The ground, to a considerable depth, is full of it. In summer what looks like a thick hoarfrost of salt efflorescence lies on the surface, and when the pools dry up a cake of salt several inches thick coats the space. Vast flocks of pelicans, Egyptian ibis, and flamingoes haunt these brackish, reedy "broads," adding to the African aspect of the landscape, which is completed by the continual summer mirage, when the salt and sandy plains take the semblance of one vast lake. Herds of cattle, bulls, oxen, and fierce wild cows, droves of sheep, and small horses of Arab blood, cover the wastes wherever irrigation has produced pasture, and the guarding, weaning, training, and branding of these herds offer some of the most remarkable features of this extraordinary country. The cattle-guards, or *gardians*, having once broken

in their fiery, active, clean-muscled little horses called *aigues*, become as completely a part of them as the Mexican Spaniards or Indians of the Pampas. Without saddle or stirrups they will gallop round or among the fierce unruly bulls, spear them with the trident, or three-pronged fork, brand them with hot irons, and even leap their horses over them when danger becomes imminent from their horns. When they dismount and leave the horses free to graze, they come again at their whistle like dogs. During the branding or *ferrade*, and bull races, many of the cattle-guards are killed, or so badly wounded that they remain maimed or crippled and helpless for life; yet these fierce, brave race of men never flinch from the office, and the ranks of cattle-guards fill in like a regiment of soldiers in battle.

There is no doubt that the life of wild lawless freedom in the open air, with its rushing gallops, the sense of complete mastery over their horses, and the pride they take in the beauty of their fierce, dangerous cattle, has an intense charm for the Provençal cattle-guards, which counterbalances the sense of continual danger, homelessness, and fatigue. Still, in a general way, the life is not considered so "respectable" as that of the salt-collectors (*sauviers*), whose work is one of the most disagreeable, monotonous, depressing, and unhealthy in Europe. The saltpans are connected in a sort of chain by canals, which have to be kept clean and unencumbered of stones and rubbish. The

pans themselves require a great deal of attention, and when the salt is collected and piled, it must be carefully covered from the damp and wet. During great part of the year the mistral blows incessantly in Provence, sometimes bringing with it damp vapours, driving mists, and soaking rain-storms. This prevailing wind of "Sunny Provence" is so violent that it lifts clouds of sand and stones, carrying them in its course with great force, unroofs ricks and houses, and has even been known to unseat men on horseback, and throw them on the ground. Much damage is therefore often caused to the salt in its preparation, and while forming in crystals, and very much weariness of flesh and spirit is the consequence to the poor saltmen engaged. The mistral frequently brings with it a dense yellow haze, which, besides its darkening, gloomy, and depressing effects, is also very unwholesome. Altogether, the salt districts of the Camargue do not offer a cheerful aspect.

Such as it is, however, the inhabitants are deeply attached to their wild, African-looking region ; and, pallid, emaciated, and fever-stricken as they are, cannot bear the idea of removal. Their unhedged, unwalled levels, with their occasional reaches of pine forest, are beautiful in their sight ; their feasts and gatherings of cattle-guards and their families are high festivals to them ; and in their wild, unfettered freedom, they almost look with pity upon the farmers, or inhabitants of the *mas*, who are bound to a distinct

and recurrent system of labour to ensure their crops ; and those who are looked upon with the most unfeigned pity, above all, are the professional men, the doctor, the lawyer, the maire, and the substantial tradesmen—as we should say, “chimney-pots :” *chapeaux noirs*—of the one town of the district, Aigues Mortes. If beyond the lowest depth a deeper still was to be sounded by the plummet of Camargasean opinion, it lay behind the glorious, crenellated, arcaded battlements of that marvellous old town.

But it is time to return to Cabridelle, the old farm in which the Privas family, from father to son, had dwelt for generations, and which, while carefully handed down as a precious heirloom, had gradually mouldered and crumbled away till portions of it threatened to fly before every fresh mistral wind. The utmost amount of labour and exertion never achieved more than the collecting of the thick, fat mud brought down by the Rhone ; the storing and working it with a certain amount of chalk or lime, and the *varech* or seaweed thrown up on the shore ; and keeping the dykes in order, that the salt water might obey the direction of the incomparable Critic—

“ Ever while you live, Thames, keep between your banks.”

Finally the mud was spread upon the spaces thus severed and secured from the salt flood. After that—which was clearly a process requiring a considerable outlay of labour, if not of money—there

were the crops to sow, to weed, and to house ; and scarcely was this toil over before the collection of the next year's mud compost must begin again. Breathing time for building repairs there was none, and all that Privas could possibly manage was to replace the stone flags that were blown off the roof, and to keep the old house weathertight from the driving winds and rain. Still, in a rough, careless fashion, there was plenty of wealth at Cabridelle ; and corn, wine, silk, oil, honey, and flax were more abundantly stored in the old *bicoq* than in many a lordly chateau on the Upper Rhone.

Privas and his two women-kind fully enjoyed the meal this morning, for they had all been long afoot ; and while Noël was satisfying the dogs, who had posted themselves on each side of her, licking their chops, and every now and then spasmodically getting up, and sitting down again on their haunches, with a short whine of appeal, Privas said to his mother, “ You can let Noël go to her bees, and wash up the things yourself. I have a word or two to say.”

“ Of course, Nicole ! Child, run away to the garden, and see what the bees want, and the worms (silk-worms); your father and I have business. And, Noël,” she called after her, as the girl, nothing loath, was going out with the dogs, “ when you have satisfied the bees, take up the stockings, that your father may have that new pair on Sunday.”

Noel made her usual graceful acquiescing sign, and

vanished with Roi and Réné, shutting the heavy door after her.

"She's a good girl, Noël, mother, and what I have to say is about her."

"She is well enough, as young girls go," replied the old woman, "but it never does to praise girls any more than it would do to feed them on nougat cake instead of bread. Are you thinking of marrying her, Nicole? She is young yet; only a child."

"Noël is over sixteen, mother, and in Provence sixteen is not childhood. Rambert has made a proposal for her to-day. He has been casting sheep's eyes on her wherever he has seen her, ever since he was last on this meadow."

"Rambert the cattle-guard?" exclaimed the old woman, with scant signs of pleasure.

"Rambert the cattle-guard; and what does that look and uplifted hand mean, mother?"

"Why, Nicole, he is like—like the old god Hercules himself, I should think, when, as the nuns used to teach us, all the stones were rained down on the Crau." *

"Well, Hercules was a great man in his day, if all tales are true," replied Nicole, with relish of the allusion. "Now I come to think of it, Rambert is rather

* The Crau is a desert of some forty thousand acres of round stones, deposited by the Rhone and Durance at some primeval period below Arles. It is said to have been the scene of the fight of Hercules and the Ligurians.

like Hercules, for there is nothing he sets himself to do that he can't do, and he gets the better of all his enemies, which, if I recollect, Hercules also did. Many a good old Provençal song there is about that Greek and his labours, and the fights with the giants on the Crau. But now, mother, business if you please."

"But, Nicole, a cattle-guard! Why, I would sooner Noël married the *saunier* Mézas, at Sambuc, than that. Mézas at least has his saltpans and tanks, and land, and a house to live in. Rambert is a wanderer—a rough, brown giant of a fellow, with only some old *bicoeq* of stables for himself, and his *aigues*, the *aigues* being perhaps better cared for than himself. I would rather think of Mézas."

"So would not I," replied Nicole, with decision, but without showing the least sharpness at his mother's resistance, for he was too good a Provençal, or, we may rather say, too good a Frenchman, not to reverence his mother's authority, and treat her with the utmost forbearance. "So would not I; and look you, mother, Rambert will be another man when he takes himself a wife and has a home of his own, especially when that wife is a *doumaiselette* (young lady) like our girl. Rambert is like all other cattle-guards, weather-brown and uncombed, and rough in his speech and ways, but he will fine down when Noël takes him in hand, whom he loves like the apples of both his eyes. Even when he saw her this morning his face had a new look which I never saw in it before. And he is a fine,

handsome fellow when he is clean, and combed, and dressed."

"And is she to live in the stables then?" said Paquette, the look of supreme disdain still fixed in her brown old face. "Pécaïre! Nicole, there is a little too much sand in thine eyes just now!"

"Mother, there is not a grain. To think how you women judge of men by their blouses! I dare say you would like Noël to marry a 'chimney-pot' and go live at Aigues Mortes; or maybe you would choose a spruce, stork-legged Nimois (citizen of Nîmes) for your grandson-in-law? To think of that yellow-faced skeleton, Mézas, who has the ague fever every August, marrying our pretty Noël! She would be a widow before she was well a wife, mother. Come, where else is the sand, I wonder!"

"But if she were a widow, she would be well left," replied the thrifty old woman. "Mézas has money in the Nîmes bank, and they even say he has shares in the Craponne.* Madame Mézas could wear all silk weeds if she chose."

"That is a woman's look-out for a bridal!" exclaimed Nicole, laughing heartily. "No, no, mother; poor little Noël must have a brighter prospect than of wearing her weeds, silk or not. You will find that Rambert is a good husband for her. His uncle, old La Bouce, is dead at Aigues Mortes, and has left him

* A great canal, so named from the family of Craponne, who began it.

quite a little fortune in houses there. If Rambert chose, he could give up his cattle trade and go and live at Aigues Mortes as fine as the best chimney-pot among them all. But he is right not to try it. He says he will never leave the levels, and pines, and free fresh air, for a city life, nor will he take Noël away from the Camargue and from being able to see us. He will get a nice little house built at the stables, sheltered by the pines, and there she can bring up her children, and look after her garden and fowls as a woman should. And you can go and help her through it all, mother, and teach her the best ways of keeping house."

"Aye, aye ! I'll warrant I know all that," replied Paquette complacently. "The daughter and the grand-daughter, and then the great grandchildren, must walk the same road. Well, I suppose it is God's will. Have you spoken to Noël, my son ?"

"No, no ; not yet. Time enough ! Only do you get forward with her linen and clothes, and Rambert must come to supper. And after that I will say my word to the child, that she may treat him henceforward in a proper, modest, submissive way."

The old woman looked at him for a moment, as he was thus reckoning on his child as a piece of wax to be run into a mould. She knew that men of their country were from time immemorial used to dispose of their daughters in marriage according to some settled plan, but she also knew that Provençal women were not

always of such wax-like ductility as to bear it, and that terrible tragedies had come about within her own memory, and that of her son too. After a pause of reflection she said, with more solemnity than usual, "I would speak to Noël before thou goest further, Nicole, if I were thee."

"What do you mean by that, mother?" he asked, looking up sharply from the boxwood bowl he was carving, and with the sub-irritation which men show when everything is not smoothly acquiescent with their will. "Why should I speak to Noël? Is there any man in her head, or have you put into it any of your notions about Rambert and cattle-guards not being fit for her?"

"May the Blessed Marys open your eyes, my son! I have never even thought of speaking to the child about anything like a man. It is not the way with our people, nor ever, I hope, will be. Noël is yet a *picciuna* (baby) in mind and heart, as innocent as the kids or chickens she feeds; but for all that she is not like other girls, and I know she has many thoughts in her mind. She is not like her mother in that, for she broods and thinks, and often I have wished she did not think so much; and there is a look in her eyes that might have come from the Saracen princess whom the old Count Privas of former days is said to have carried away and shut up in Aigues Mortes. I would not cross Noël too far myself."

"Well-a-well! there's never any knowing what

newfangled fowl women will hatch off common hens-eggs!" said Privas, who had suspended his knife, and sat with the bowl motionless in his thin, brown hands, while she was speaking. "Foi de Dieu! don't I know my own child? and can't I make her do what I choose too, or know why? But there! you women are like the *marin* (sea-wind) itself. Without a moment's notice, and while you are quietly fishing in the sunshine, there comes the white squall, and every one is drowned! I'm a fool to listen or to be upset by it, and don't you mind me either, mother. Do you just make Rambert welcome, and I'll see about Noël."

"I'll do my part, Nicole, and when he is likely to come to supper, see if I don't treat him well. He shall eat food cooked as he has never tasted it in his life before."

"That's right, mother. Now I'll leave you to your distaff, and go look after the mulberry leaves."

CHAPTER III.

RAMBERT THE CATTLE-GUARD.

WHETHER it was from some latent instinct which Paquette's words had wakened, or from some observation subsequent to them of his own, Privas did not immediately take any opportunity of speaking to Noël about her marriage, or seek to bring Rambert to the farm. He only kept his child a good deal with him, contrary to the usual custom of leaving the women together occupied in household matters. At one time he would bid her come and collect the picked mulberry leaves in large, light reed baskets, from the sheets of cotton cloth spread for them under the trees; and, again, he would bid her take the dogs and drive out the kids to nibble the pasture hidden under the stones, or go to the pine wood to collect the dry cones which are so invaluable for kindling. In this way he kept her much with him, and thus saw more of her than he had ever done before. And although he was not a far-seeing or a deep-seeing man, nor possessed the life-wisdom which his mother had

stored up from much thought and many sorrows, still he awoke to the knowledge that Noël, under her child self, the childhood of age, innocence, and utter removal from evil, hid a ripe woman's force of character, and a fiery strength of passion which it would not be well to rouse to opposition or urge beyond her control.

He therefore bided his time, and waited for some natural opportunity of letting Rambert show himself at his best. This opportunity would occur at an approaching festival, a *musecade*, or general muzzling of the *cédéls* or calves in split reeds, which was the weaning time of the herd. The *musecade* was not in itself particularly cheerful or festive, but the population of that dreary, townless region make the best of things, and turn every occasion of meeting together to advantage. When the time draws near for a *musecade*, the cattle-guards look carefully to their horses and their own appearance, that they may show well in the eyes of the young women who flock to witness the ceremony ; and the girls, on their part, are not behind-hand in getting themselves up with ribbons, bordered aprons, and coloured shawls, which may in some degree set off their pale, colourless cheeks, and sharp features. Little two-wheeled carts called *taps* are harnessed, each with a fiery little horse, and scurry lightly over the levels, driven by the women themselves. Larger carts carry whole families, dressed in their best, well furnished with maize, bread, salads, and preparations

for *bouillabaise*, comprising, I am sorry to say, much garlic and oil. Men ride the little, restive, half-broken horses, with long spurs; and there is as much life and movement towards the scene of action as if it were the Derby-day.

There was going to be a *muselade* now, and Rambert's *rédéls* would form a conspicuous feature among the calves whose noses were to be garnished with the split-reed muzzle. Noël was excited at the prospect of going, for the first time since her childhood, to this festival, and as the scene of action was some miles off, there was the prospect of quite an expedition, and a whole day's pleasure. Her delight was much increased when, on the morning of the day, a smart, new, fawn-coloured little cart, with scarlet wheels, was driven into the yard, drawn by a beautiful little blue-roan horse with a white mane and tail, decorated with long ear-tassels of raw silk, dyed of the brightest red. Noël, who was feeding the fowls, was the first to see the cart, and rushing into the kitchen, she exclaimed,

“Oh, Gran, there's a new cart come! Are we to go in it to St. Cecile?”

“Ask your father, child; I don't know what he has planned.”

“Oh, father!” (Privas came in at that moment) “have you seen the new cart, and the grey *aigue*? Are we going in it, father? Who is going in it?”

“You and I are going in it.”

"And how is Gran going, then? She *is* going, isn't she, father?"

"She is going in the big farm covered cart, child, with Jeanne Mézas and Mariette Roux. This cart is lent to me to drive you in to-day."

"Lent, father?" asked Noël astonished, and looking up from laying the table as expeditiously as she could. "I did not know there were any new people come to the levels."

"Not very new. It is Rambert's cart, and his best young *aigue*."

"Rambert's cart?" Again Noël looked up surprised. "Why, I never knew that cattle-guards were dandies enough to drive themselves about in carts with red wheels."

"Well, anyhow *we* are going to drive in it," said Privas, concealing a slight sense of being disconcerted. "And I think Rambert is very kind to give us the first turn in it. You must be sure and thank him too, Noël."

"Yes, if we see him," she replied; "but I dare say he will be too busy with his *védéls* to think about us. Now, father, will you come to breakfast; and then we can go, can't we, all the sooner?"

Privas was well pleased to see his daughter's eagerness, and they sat down to the usual meal of soup, bread, and salad, with the unusual addition of new cheese and a bottle of wine. When the food had been dispatched, Paquette bade Noël leave the clearing away

to her, as the farm cart was not to start till later, and get herself ready to go with her father, who was now leading the fiery little horse out of the stable door. Noël's preparations were soon made. She had on already her best gown, of fine striped red and white cotton, the white ground exceedingly white, and the close, small stripes of the deepest ingrained red. Over this was a long muslin, frilled apron, with pockets and red ribbons, and a little rich yellow-green shawl was folded closely across and pinned behind. Just in the opening made by crossing the shawl or handkerchief hung a large filagree silver cross, tied round her slender brown neck by a narrow black velvet. Her long, fine, dusky hair was plaited as usual into a coronet, and through the back of it was run two great filagree-headed silver pins. On this occasion Noël wore white stockings, and her little feet were shod with untanned leather shoes.

Privas looked at this figure with pardonable pride as she took her seat beside him in the cart, and as she signed many farewells to "Gran" and enjoined her many times to make haste and come after them, he gave the fiery little horse the rein, and they flew forward like a shuttlecock driven by a smart blow.

The sun had not, even yet, long risen, and the level golden rays were slanting across the sand, glittering on the asters and marigolds, and turning the shining particles to jewels on their path. The tall reeds rustled and waved as they flew along the edge of the lake, and

flamingoes glanced like live flames through the rushy coverts. The wild ducks were leading their young in broad squadrons across the water, and every bird, and rush, and flower seemed to be rejoicing in the new day. Noël looked away as far as her eye could reach to the eastward, and saw, far beyond the sands and stones and marshes of the Camargue, the sunlit, misty forms of the Dauphiné Alps, appearing and disappearing like solemn angels in the morning haze. There was something partly solemn and partly joyful in her feelings at the spectacle, which made her think of the "Magnificat" as she had last heard it at Vespers at Les Stes. Maries, when the pealing organ and the many voices had seemed to open Heaven's gates and allow her a dim glimpse of the kingdom within. Noël had not had much experience of religious pleasures, and the Sunday Mass at St. Bertrand was generally the limit of her opportunities of public worship; but she had a mind which, while not given to that form of pious sentiment usually shared by women, was deeply religious, and open to the discernment of the loftier and nobler side both of external things and the feelings and emotions which most stir us. The springing grass, the waving reeds, the breath of the pines in spring, the joyful flight of the young pelicans and wildfowl, the bounding rush of the droves of horses and *bioués* (bullocks) across the levels, and, as now, the rarer sight of the far-off, solemn mountain peaks clad in shimmering mist, brought to Noël's mind the sense

of deep emotions and lofty aspirations stirring within her, which her daily life seemed to check and confine, and which its narrow claims seemed never able to fill. At such moments of exulting joy in the stirring, as of a spirit brooding on a formless and unfinished world, she felt that there was no life of confessoryship she could not have carried out, no martyr's death she could not have borne, no long labour of self-sacrifice and devotion which her powers could not fulfil. Then some shining vision of such a life would rise before her in which herself, with all her petty faults and worries and trivial daily tasks, would be merged and lost, under the claims of a lofty, urgent need or companionship, tasking her present strength and capacities to the utmost, while raising her to ever fresh knowledge and glimpses into other worlds of being. If she might only learn more and more every day, instead of winding cocoons, and feeding fowls, and knitting stockings, and filling her grandmother's distaff with flax or wool! If she could only have a teacher, there would be some hope, though this was by far the dimmest and mistiest portion of Noël's vision. Meanwhile, the fresh, clear morning air raised her spirits, while it fanned her cheeks, and the sight of friends and acquaintances, or quite new people scurrying along in their little carts, drew a veil again over the loftier glimpses which had brought into her eyes that pathetic far-off look which made them so beautiful, and Noël gave herself up to the enjoyment of the hour.

"There is Rambert's Oriflamme!" suddenly exclaimed Privas, slackening the pony's fiery course. "Those yonder must be his cattle, feeding at the edge of that little pine wood" (he said *pinède*, but the continual recurrence of patois would become a weariness).

"I wonder why the bell-ox is roving so far off?" replied Noël. "What eyes he has, father; and do look at his chest and shoulders!"

"Yes, he is the finest bell-ox on the run," said Privas, still looking earnestly towards the pine wood. "I think I see Rambert on his aigue, galloping out there almost as far as my eyes can reach. Something must be the matter."

"Yes, look how Oriflamme goes questing, like a dog, in and out of the reeds and canes," said Noël. "Perhaps they have lost some calves."

The mystery was solved sooner than they had expected, or than was agreeable, by a sudden loud, fierce bellowing, as Oriflamme, who was making his way in and out among a vast brake of tufted reeds, like a snorting railway engine out for a holiday, thrust his huge head into a fresh corner of the brake, and discovered the object of his search. The enormous missing bull, Les Rochers, disturbed in his new liberty and enjoyment of a tuft of fresh-leaved, aromatic shrubs, at the same time thrust his great head and long shining horns in the air, and bellowed viciously with all the power of his lungs; and having thus sounded the trumpet for battle, he rushed towards the faithful

trained ox, and seemed about to put an end to his labours at one blow. Oriflamme quietly waited for his mad onset, and then, like a cool-headed knight at a joust, swerved rapidly to one side, and, as the bull passed, wounded him sharply on the left flank with one horn. The enraged monster, beside himself with pain, trampled the earth and threw up the canes into the air, screaming and bellowing, in attitudes that would have made a sculptor's fortune as the type of “the divine force” uncontrolled.

Privas rapidly put the reins into Noël's hands, and unslinging a little horn he wore on his shoulder, blew with it a long, shrill, mournful cry, which echoed over the level to a much greater distance than louder sounds. He had retaken the reins, and was about to urge forward the pony again, still keeping his head turned towards the far-off cattle, when Les Rochers, spying for the first time the scarlet tassels tossing in the air as the cart turned round, sprang out of the cane brake with a hideous roar, and dashed exactly towards the cart, with his mouth foaming and his head nearly touching the earth. In a few minutes, as Privas was well aware, in spite of the helpful by-play of the faithful Oriflamme, the pony, his child, and himself would be thrown violently in the air, to fall in one crushed and mangled heap before the enraged beast. He involuntarily touched Noël, saying, “Be brave, child, and sit quite still!” which she answered under her breath by—“Stes. Maries, dear Saints, help us!” and Privas gave

the little horse one lash, loosing the reins at the same moment, to allow him to bound forward at full speed. The clever little Arab, well used to the levels and the continual attacks of the fierce cattle, swerved so swiftly and violently aside, that Privas made sure Noël was thrown out of the cart; but the girl had clutched the side with a grip like steel, and was sitting pale and set beside him, with even a smile on her slightly parted lips. But though the bull's thrust was missed, he was now just behind the cart, and was rushing forward for the final toss with his huge, tawny head and broad-reaching horns nearly on the ground, swept with the long flakes of hair at his chest, and his black tufted tail lashing wildly in the air. Just as Privas thought the last shock was come, and an unaccustomed prayer rose on his lips, a tremendous roar was heard from the bull, whom Rambert had attacked on the side with his trident, while at the same time he threw a great knotted leather thong over his horns, and then galloping round and round him at the full speed of his powerful grey horse, he succeeded in throwing the furious bull to the ground, where he lay panting and bleeding, and bellowing with powerless rage. Ori-flamme took up his post beside him, exactly as a cattle-dog would have done, while Rambert, throwing himself from his horse, ran to the cart to grasp Privas by the hand, and make sure for himself that Noël was none the worse for her fright. In the excitement the strong expression of his feelings escaped him.

"Noël! Noël!" he panted, for he had not yet had a moment to regain breath. "Are you hurt, my child? Did the beast touch the cart? Did he touch you, my—child?"

"I am not the least hurt, Rambert. He never quite touched us, thanks to the Stes. Maries. But you are wounded yourself! Oh, father, look at his arm!"

"Ouf! a mere cat's scratch!" said Rambert, disdainfully glancing at a sharp graze made by one of the bull's horns at his final fall. "Your smallest handkerchief would bind up such a wound as that, and scarcely tell tales. Will you have a gourd of water, Noël? Mine was fresh from the jar just now. You look pale, my child. I shall have Les Rochers killed. I shall always hate him now!"

"Oh no, no, Rambert!" cried Noël. "Poor, beautiful beast! He was angry at something, and then just as Oriflamme wounded him he spied our red tassels. I should like to cure him; and oh, father, do let me get out! I think he is bleeding very much."

"Let him bleed, cursed beast!" said Privas savagely. "It will do him good to let some of the wickedness out of him! I would gladly kill him myself for the fright he put me in for you, child."

Noël, however, was not to be gainsaid this time. Her father saw, with vexation, that the interest of Rambert's wound was quite effaced by the bull's far more serious hurts; and Noël, jumping out of the cart,

quickly gathered handfuls of rosemary and of another aromatic herb, crushed the leaves deftly on a large flat stone, and laid them softly on the bull's wounded side. She then begged a little water from Rambert's gourd, with which she soaked her handkerchief, and laid it over the herbs, gently pressing it down. The bull had apparently returned to his normal state of mind, and the girl's presence and care for his comfort evidently produced a soothing effect. His bellowing was reduced to low groans ; he licked her hands, and strove in various ways to express his goodwill, and seemed so comforted by the compress of herbs, that Rambert allowed him to get on his legs, and, having fastened him to the bell-ox by the bulls-hide thong, to follow the march towards the pine wood, whither the whole party slowly proceeded.

" You ought to have given Rambert your handkerchief, child, instead of wasting it on that vicious beast," said Privas in a hurried voice, on the way. " He has saved your life and your father's this day, Noël, and you make no more of it than if he had given you a drink of water, but must needs bestow all your interest on the savage beast that put us all in jeopardy. You ought to thank him from your very heart before we go farther on."

" I will, father ; I will, indeed !" said Noël, hurt that she should have been found wanting in gratitude, which to her mind was the lowest depth of ill. " I somehow felt as if taking care of Les Rochers was

thanking him ; but I cannot help being glad that *he* has my handkerchief."

" Why so ? What do you mean, child ? " asked Privas sharply.

" I don't think I can explain what I mean, father, I don't like men to have my things. But the poor bull has no friends : and, oh, he was so very much hurt ! "

Privas said sundry inarticulate words, probably not of the most improving nature, but there was no use in being angry with Noël ; and he supposed, as he had done many times before, that she was too young yet to be like other girls.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MUSELADE, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

As soon as the cart halted at the pine wood and Privas and his daughter had stept out of it, Noël walked a little way through the trees to where Rambert was giving directions to a rough little boy. When he had broken off and hurried the boy to his task of driving the straggling calves up to the centre of the herd, she said to the cattle-guard, "I did not half enough thank you, Rambert, for saving our lives. Father and I do so thank and bless you, and we shall never forget it. I ought to have said it before, but I was thinking of the poor suffering beast."

"More than of the poor suffering man," said Rambert, his rare smile brightening and softening his granite face.

"The bull has no soul, Rambert."

"He has not. Is that why you care for him more than for me?"

"In one sense," replied the girl simply and slowly, as if puzzling out her own meaning. "Suffering does

him no good ; it brings him no fruit ; and he will have no reward. Besides, he has done no sin, with all his fierceness, and he ought not to be punished, except so far as to keep us from harm."

"That is all true, I believe, but I never thought of it before. I'm only a simple, rough man, Noël ; and while I am taming the beasts I only think of taming them and getting the better of them. I suppose God made them for us, and made us to be their masters, and intended them to obey."

"Yes, Rambert ; but I think their masters ought not to be cruel, because our Lord was merciful to every one : and, if I could have it so, I should like everything in the world to be happy."

"You could make every creature in the world happy, Noël, and you could make me happier than all the world. Will you do so ?"

"Yes, if I can," replied Noël, still slowly, and looking away from him with eyes that seemed to take in the whole charge of all the universe.

"Indeed you can. Will you be my wife ? Your father is willing."

"No, no, no, Rambert !" Noël broke in, once more exclaiming, as she had done before, but now with more passionate energy ; "I shall never marry any one ! I can't bear you to talk so ! Let me go to father !"

And Noël flew rather than walked away from him, across the rough, unequal ground, nor ever stopt till she had put her hand upon her father's arm, and said

passionately, “Father, take me away from here ! Take me home ! Take me *now* !”

“Home ! away ! Are you mad, child ? My poor little lamb, has that savage *palusin** so frightened thee ?”

Noël burst into tears, and for some instants could not answer. Then, in the lowest possible tone, she said sobbing, “Not the bull ! Take me away from Rambert !”

“Has he spoken to you about—has he asked you to be his wife ?”

“Yes, father, but I never will ?”

“Highty-tighty, little one ! Why not ?”

“I told you, father, once before, that I never will be any man’s wife ! I will not, I will not !”

“Well-a-well ! this is sheer madness ! What maggot bites you I know not, child, but some day you will sing quite another tune. When I am dead and gone, where are you to live, and who is to take care of you and give you bread and meat ? But come ! you are just upset now, and we will say nothing more about it. How vexing it all is, just as Rambert has saved us from a horrible death, you should turn upon him in this way ! His whole heart is wrapt up in you, Noël, and he is a fair, just, trusty man.”

“I know he is ; but, but—why did he say *that* ? I was just thanking him with all my heart, and——”

“Aye, aye ! I understand it now. He would have

* *Palusin*, the Provençal name for bulls.

been wiser to have waited, but a man can't always make love like a sum on a slate. Come, think no more of it, and we'll not spoil our day's sport, but just put it all by till another while. I'll go speak to the poor lad, and I'll engage he'll not trouble you again. Sit you down here in the cart till I come back."

As Noël crept into her former seat she thought she had been very foolish and selfish in wishing to take her father away from his sport and holiday, and felt very much as if she would like to be one of the calves that were now coming bounding like antelopes across the level, or Roi or René, who were standing alternately on the wheel, thrusting their heads with competitive jealousy into her hand. She crumpled herself up in the cart, and carefully avoided looking at anything but the two dogs and their games. She had often beheld inward visions and dreamt dreams; craving for a changed life, for loftier teaching, and for a teacher to convey it. Was this the heavier and more wounding cross which Père Maurel had once told her was always given if the common life-burthen were thrown aside? Was *marriage* to be her cross? Words had crossed her path here and there without her entertaining, till lately, any idea of their significance, except that somebody, who would be called her husband, would take her away from Cabridelle and her father and grandmother, to another house, where there would be other spinning and winding of cocoons, and feeding of fowls on her own

account. “*When thou hast a house of thine own, how wouldst thou like to have it in a muddle all day?*” had been one of Paquette’s earliest lessons on the advantage of putting away the spoons and dishes promptly and clean, and of keeping the flax and raw silk in their proper receptacles, instead of leaving them hanging over chair-backs and lying on the dresser. “*When you have a house of your own, you will want to have the meals done and over at a regular time,*” had been her father’s invariable answer to her childish petitions for gathering wood-flowers and watching the ducks when eating hours approached. And many a former groan and sigh, and impatient yawn and stretch over the distaff, had been quenched by her grandmother’s deep or grating contralto, as her mood might be—“Who will spin thee thy husband’s sheets and linen if thou canst not put thy hand to the spindle?” All life in her elders’ eyes seemed to revolve about this central act of the drama, or climax to the epic—marriage, a husband, a separate life and home. And now it had suddenly fallen at her feet. Here was the husband offering her the home. The marriage was at her door. What had made her instantly put up bar and bolt, and declare that it could never be? Why was her whole nature alight and alive with that one energetic “no”?

And Rambert?

Noël looked through her shading fingers, between which tears were also slowly trickling, and saw the

cattle-guard riding away, with a sad and dejected air, that contrasted strongly with the bright, living presence that had exchanged those words with her only a few minutes since. Were they really minutes? It was as if years had passed over her head. The mighty frame of the gardian looked bent and worn, and all over stricken with weakness. He got on his grey horse, Bayard, with an effort, and after looking across the sands with a weary, doubtful glance, he gathered himself up and went on with the work in hand. Whether he were sad or whether he were glad, the herd of *vérols* must be muzzled all the same, so he put spurs to Bayard and galloped away; while Privas came slowly back to the cart, got into it without a word, took the reins from Noël's hand, and drove off quickly to the place of meeting, followed by the dogs. Privas maintained a dogged silence all the time, looking sulkily at the pony's ears; and Noël was too unhappy and sorrowful to attempt a word of remark.

When they got to the meeting-place—where a sort of barrier had been built of carts, hay trucks, and stakes, with the heavier furniture from the farms, called in general the *cabaois*, behind which the older and more sedentary portion of the spectators were camped—Privas said shortly, without looking at his daughter, “Do not say anything about Rambert to your grandmother. I'll tell her by-and-by myself;” and bidding Noël rather roughly make haste and get into the covered cart in which Paquette and some

elder women were sitting, he took the pony away to unharness and give it some fodder, where the rest of the horses were picketed in a group.

Noël was glad to sit down between her grandmother and old Jeanne Mézas, and to be told to lift up her gown thriftily, and sit on her petticoat, and to be careful not to touch the wheels, which had been newly greased. She was glad when Jeanne kindly stroked her long hair-plaits, and said, "Bless thee, my child ! Thou art grown a tall *dounaiselette*, and must be useful now to thy Gran." It made her feel again like a child that is protected by its childish years, and as if she had got back into her eggshell instead of having hatched out into some strange form and state of being which she knew not, and whose conditions of life she could never fulfil. She resolved to stay in her eggshell as long as she could, and take all the good of it; and thus rousing herself, she became gradually aware of all that was going on. She was helped in this by Paquette's entire absorption in the festivity, and her eager reminiscences as one and another passing object called up circumstances or persons of a former day, which entirely prevented the keen-eyed old woman from observing the change in Noël's face since she had left her at day-break.

"Look, look, Jeanne ! there are two fresh herds of *rédéls*. That large one comes from St. Bertrand. I know the gardian, Arcoux. His grandfather and

my father, Desiré Taras, were like two brothers, and they always kept their cattle on the same *téradou*. Old Arcoux was a great man at the *ferrade*. He would just take the strongest *palusin* by the horns, and throw him on the sand as you would toss a child down to be whipped."

"Aye, aye! men were stronger and braver in our day, Paquette. There were no railways then, and women did not drink tea, which they tell me they do every day at Aigues Mortes. It stands to reason that women who live on foreign tisane must have weakly children. Don't tell me!"

"You're right there, Jeanne. I'm glad no tea was ever seen at Cabridelle, except rosemary tisane, when Noël's mother used to get her faintings. Dear heart! it always refreshed her very much. There! here comes a fresh drove. Dame! what a sweet lot of cows! Look how they trot, and their backs are as flat as my kitchen-table. Whose are they, I wonder?"

"There's a *palusin* for you!" responded Jeanne, pointing to Les Rochers, who had now been freed, and was slowly moving along in sullen majesty a little apart from the herd.

"And there's a *dondaire*! Ah, here comes the gardian. It is Rambert. I know him a little; he's a rough man, but a good and trustworthy. He has come to the *téradou* between us and St. Cécile, and is going to build himself a house, they say, and enlarge his stables."

"Ah, ha ! and perhaps to settle down ?" said Jeanne, with the inevitable woman's logic of experience.

"May be so," returned Paquette briefly, for she was a prudent old woman, and knew when to bridle her tongue. "There come all the *védlés* ! Look, child ; ain't that a pretty lot of young calves ? I am afraid you don't see well where you are, and that Mère Jeanne and I are having all the best of the show to ourselves."

"Oh no, Gran !" Noël said eagerly ; "I can see quite well. The sun has made my head ache a little, not being used to be out in it at this time of the day ; but if I keep quiet it will go off."

"Well-a-well ! I wonder what will come to the girls next ?" said Paquette. "Headache with the sun ! Why, here am I, as good at being roasted as coffee-berries, and I eighty-two come next Assumption !"

"It's all those railways !" said Jeanne ; and then, looking round at Noël's pale face, she said pitifully, "Why, dear soul, you do look bad ; and whatever makes it, it's just as bad to bear. Here, you change places with me, and then you can lean against this wine-barrel, and rest your poor head." The good-natured old lady accordingly carried her point, and Noël was niched in the corner, where she could rest both her eyes and her head with silence, a support, and looking only dreamily at the sky and general landscape before her, for which she just now felt deeply thankful.

Dreamily, she thus saw the herd of which Lambert was guard—the largest and most splendid in the neighbourhood—pass before her mottled brown, brown and white, tawny, and jet black. The tawny, small-headed, deer-like cows were unusually fierce, restless, and shy, knowing perfectly well that their calves were, by some mysterious means, going to be taken from them. The calves themselves, as wiry and fine-boned as young harts and hinds, were playing and galloping in every direction which the drivers and bell-oxen allowed. The huge bulls, fitly chosen by the earliest defaulters from the knowledge of the one true Godhead as the type of majesty and force—ineffable greatness and illimitable strength—marched slowly along, as sacrificial victims worthy of sacrifice, looking like some endless frieze or the very epic of primitive life. Noël's eyes, indeed, could not see—for “the eye sees only what it brings with it the power of seeing”—the poet's dream which might have filled up the pauses between the acts with young boys, full-eyed, and long-locked girls in flowing white tunics, and red-lipped fair women garlanded together and wreathed with ears of corn, aptly linking all the details of this living poem together in one harmonious rhythm. Nor, therefore, did she see that to the discerning mind this rhythmic frieze was prophetic of the final Age of Peace, when man shall have returned to his first innocence and his first love, and all creation shall have ceased to groan and travail

for sin. When drove after drove of calves had been separated from its own herd, and urged together into a sort of inclosure partly of a living rampart of bell-oxen, partly of gardians and a large body of the owners on horseback, partly of the stands of carts and pales ; when all this had been achieved, the cattle-guards and their assistants leapt from their horses, ran to the piles of split muzzles that were ranged on purpose at intervals, and then each one seizing the calves dexterously in turn, forced their noses and mouths into the cylinder of split wood, which closed over it so tightly as to hinder any attempt at drawing milk from the cows. This rough procedure, done with no soft or gentle hands, set the poor calves frantically running up and down, shaking their heads to rid themselves of the muzzles, and lowing piteously in a muffled way ; while all the cows responded with contralto voices, lashing their tails, and throwing their heads in the air. They ended by trotting up and down, seeking out and leading away their own calves, when they could quietly lick them all over to soothe their discomfort and wounded feelings.

This first act of muzzling the calves was comparatively easy, but when it came to the *bioulés*, or elder young bullocks, that by some accident had never yet been taken from the cow, there followed a stiff fight, and a tremendous uproar, upon which the women of course reckoned as the cream of the festivity. Some of

the cattle-guards were knocked down, ignominiously biting the dust; many of them were wounded and grazed by the bullocks' horns and teeth, and some of the most obstreperous *biogles* got away altogether, when the cattle-guards were forced to put off the chase of them to another day. But Paquette failed not to observe and to remark aloud that none of these disasters occurred to Rambert. He seemed to be here and there and everywhere at once. His horse was the freshest and the best trained to follow the whistle or to stand stockstill; his bullocks showed the most carefully cultivated sagacity; and his hand and arm seemed untiring, irresistible, and unconquerable, with the strongest and fiercest bullock in his employer's herd. Murmurs of admiration several times swelled to loud shouts and cries of delight, as muzzle after muzzle was fixed upon the most vicious of the young cattle, and as Rambert mastered them while screaming and kicking on the ground. It became bruited about, and the stream of rumour rolled round to Paquette and her companions, that the old Baron de l'Arc and his brother had gone among the other owners, and proposed to offer Rambert a handsome reward for his extraordinary exertions at this *mouselade*. Some even said that the cattle-guard was to be set up with a herd of his own, and made proprietor of a *téradou* at once on his own account. This last news was reported by Privas himself, who had avoided coming within reach of what may be called the Grand Stand

till a sense of overpowering hunger constrained him reluctantly to seek the quarter of food and to put his sullenness aside.

"Dame ! that is news !" said Paquette. " Why, Nicole, that is nearly an unknown thing to happen. I remember, years ago, when Arcoux's father had a present made him after a *muselade*. But it is a good many years since a thousand francs were spent like that in this country."

"Yes, and it is a good many years since a cattle-guard was seen like Rambert. Some fools look at nothing but a fellow's brown face and rough hair, as if a gardian who fears neither beast nor devil could be kept in a woman's pin-box. But women are all fools, and no mistake ; they will all let their cocoons be eaten through by the grub inside for want of knowing when to wind their silk. I say Rambert is worth all his weight in pure gold."

"And that would be a good sight of napoleons, M. Privas," laughed old Jeanne, wrinkling up her brown face with keen enjoyment. "I should say a very good sight ! He is the tallest gardian, and indeed the tallest man I have set eyes on for many a long year. Who is it that objects to his brown skin and uncombed hair, M. Privas ?"

"A good many, I dare say," put in Paquette, seeing that Nicole winced under this direct question. "But look at those strangers ; I am sure their hair and faces look as if they had been kept in pin-boxes. Who are

the two strange men out there, Nicole, talking to Rambert?"

"Oh, some strange travellers, I suppose, come to see the *mouselade*," said Privas carelessly. "I saw two men just now that looked to me like Prussians, walking about with books in their hands. They had better not come spying down here. They won't get much out of us."

"Prussians! God save us!" exclaimed Jeanne, and even Noël sprang up to see the fiends in human shape that had become suddenly visible to the naked eye in the Camargue.

"Pouf! I don't say they *are* Prussians," said Privas. "But they are just like the pictures I saw in the Aigues Mortes *Phare*, after the war, and they are no sort of Frenchmen, that I'll swear; for I heard them talking to one another in gibberish that no one could ever make out—a sort of hissing and whistling speech like some of our seafowl in a storm."

"Perhaps they are English?" ventured Noël timidly. "I've heard that the English hiss a good deal in their talk. Why, father," she added, quite forgetting her father's displeasure in her astonishment, "they have quite red and white faces, with light coloured hair! How odd it is to see girl's faces on tall, strong men!"

Privas muttered something in reply which Noël did not catch, about wishing all the girls and men removed to some less favoured region; and Paquette, seeing that he was much put out, though she could not guess the

cause, bade Noël bring out the basket and plates, and see what there was for their dinner. The food was soon unpacked. The cold meat, salads, and hard eggs were laid on the basket lid, and Noël cut up and dressed a portion of salad for each plate. There was a little barrel of wine; and in spite of his displeasure Privas not only managed to make a hearty meal himself, but summoned several friends to come and drink a cup of the rough red Hermitage which is largely made in the upper vineyards of the Rhone valley. While the party were enjoying themselves, and while so doing unconsciously painted a picture most delightful to the eye, the pair of Prussian spies were thus delivering themselves out of earshot :

“ Leo, I have swallowed my poem, and I am judiciously assimilating it. Now it’s your turn, and there stands your picture ready painted before you.”

“ I was just remarking that same to myself, while you were discoursing the giant Faun. That pair of old women—one solemnly tragic, the other finely comic—the sullen, dangerous, handsome middle-aged farmer, and those brown-faced, laughing friends of his make a fine setting and frame for the girl. By Jove ! Nasmyth, what a face that girl has ! What is she like ? Jeanne d’Are, a Mexican Madonna, or Miriam with the timbrel by the Red Sea ? ”

“ That’ll do just for a beginning. I thought of Mariana in the South till she smiled and looked up. What is she to all the rest, I wonder ? ”

"Sullen-face's daughter, I should say. She has the same bones in the forehead and jaw, as painters are bound to observe. Let us go and judge of the colouring a little nearer. It is too good a bit to lose."

The two men, who both carried a small knapsack, an object-glass, and a walking-staff' umbrella strapped about them, sauntered nearer to the covered cart and the group surrounding it, and when they came within reach took off their tall, light, shady hats, and saluted the women. The one whom his friend had called "Leo," keeping his hat still in his hand, unabashed, and with a perfect command of French, then asked if he might venture to beg a draught of wine for himself and his friend, as they had lost their way in the Camargue.

At this appeal, during which all eyes, even Noël's, were widely fixed upon him, Privas courteously, though still a little sullen, held out a cup to his mother for the wine ; and while she was filling it, he fixed his eyes kindly on the stranger, and said, "Monsieur is, perhaps, a German ?"

"Not I, indeed, sir! Do you think if I were one of those fellows I should have the face to come skulking about here in France ? We're both of us Englishmen ; though I'm afraid you will not think that much better."

"Pardon, sir, very much the contrary. The English certainly did not fight for France, but they did not come overrunning a Christian country with a host

of savages, burning poor folk's houses, and carrying away all their clocks as loot!"

"I am happy to say we had no part in any such barbarous conduct," replied Leopold, with praiseworthy gravity. "I have the honour to drink your health, sir, and the health of these ladies, and to thank you for your hospitality to two tired wanderers."

Both the men drank their wine with the same courtesies, and having made a very favourable impression on the party, they were about to take leave, when Privas said, "Whither are you bound, gentlemen, if I may ask?"

"Certainly you may," replied Leopold, who seemed naturally to assume the office of spokesman. "We are, for the present, only driftweed in the neighbourhood. I told you just now, and with a certain degree of truth, that we had lost our way. By this I mean that we had lost the track that should, I think, have taken us straight to Les Stes. Maries, which we are bound to visit. But any road which gives us sketches and new ideas is our way just now, and if you know of anything worth drawing or noting hereabouts, it will be very kind in you to point it out. As well as some house or farm—*mas*, don't you call it?—where we could have rooms, or, at least, a room with a couple of beds, for two days."

"You can come to my farm at Cabridelle, gentlemen, and welcome," replied the genuine Provençal.

"We can make you welcome that far, if you do not ask for featherbeds and carpets."

"We shall certainly take you at your word, sir," said the painter again. "Any sort of bed, even a kitchen table, will be welcome; and as to carpets in this climate, I should say the cool floor is far more agreeable. Thanks a thousand times for your true Provençal hospitality. I suppose the day's business here is nearly over?"

"The *mouselade* is over, I think, but the dancing is now going to begin. You had better accept a little food out of our basket, for it will be some time yet before we shall see home again."

After a brief consultation between the two men, this offer was gratefully accepted; and as Noël helped them to the remnants of meat and salad, a few gentle, courteous, amusing remarks were made to her by the painter, chiefly by way of getting an opportunity of looking at Noël's wonderful eyes. The tone of his voice, the gentle, calm words so considerately deferent, and the self-control and ease of good breeding, were all so new as to make a considerable impression on the girl, into whose life two real gentlemen had just now dropped for the first time. Her pale, brown cheeks tinged slightly, like colour seen under thin porcelain, her eyes looked up under their fringed lids, her delicate lips curved with that faint smile habitual to her, and she seemed to breathe more eagerly and quickly, as if the swift blood ran in a more

stirring current of life. Her horizon had widened, and, whether it were solid land or *mirage*, the landscape she was now looking at seemed touched with brighter and more divine hues.

CHAPTER V.

HARRY NASMYTH SPEAKS HIS MIND.

LEOPOLD MORLAND was drawing with all his vigour. He often sketched, etched, or lazily dashed on colour with a sort of voluptuous languor, though every stroke showed knowledge, as well as theceptive feeling and impulse which are commonly called genius. But to-day he was mixing his colours and washing them on as if the creation of his subject was to be the event of the century. Yet, while he worked, his face seemed absorbed in other things. His mind must have been working far otherwise, though as vigorously, than his long, supple hands.

Harry Nasmyth sat some way off, working out some trigonometrical problem, for which his broad, squared head, massive brow and jaw, and strong hands, showed him apt. For there are hands of a poet, and hands of a subtle thinker, and hands for science and hard brain-labour, and rock-like persistency in whatever is undertaken. These two men were each types in his own way.

The painter was certainly charming to the eye and ear, and delightful as a companion. His delicate modelled face, small ears, and long, serene violet-blue eyes, were almost feminine, as well as the thick flakes of his yellow brown hair, a little browner than his splendid beard, which flowed down like waved silk over his loose grey blouse. If his mouth could have been clearly seen, some indecision and looseness of purpose would have been read in it, but shaded and framed as it was, it was very beautiful. His hands were very delicate and taper, but he was strongly and healthily made, deep chested and well armed, as one of a former Oxford Eight should be, and he stood a little over six feet in height.

Harry Nasmyth was seven or eight years older than his friend, and unlike him in most of his qualities and characteristics. His dark brown hair lay in one thick flat mass across his square brow, rather too heavily overhanging the dark, trustworthy eyes. His nose and mouth were undisguised by beard or moustache, and showed firmness, decision, and perhaps obstinacy, in every line. But the deeply-cleft, excellently-moulded chin and jaw showed both fine character and good blood, and redeemed the general heaviness of his face. If you felt that Nasmyth was not exactly the man for gentle toying or summer half-hours, you knew instantly also that in storms and trouble he would be a refuge of rock. He had distinguished himself on the continent and in India as a civil

engineer in great works, and was just now engaged under the French Government, in taking a series of observations in the Rhone delta, with a view to finding the best basis for a network of canals. In crossing the Alps above Grenoble, he had met with this old Marlborough and Oxford chum, who as a schoolfellow had been his fag, and whom he had protected and befriended in a thousand ways, while at Oxford he had done all he could to make him give up wines and breakfasts, and read for his degree. Throughout their joint life at Oxford it had been the marvel of all his friends that the crack reading man of the year, going in for honours, should waste his hours and unsport his oak for the sake of the idle, reckless ne'er-do-well, whose only object in life seemed boating and the foolish spending of money. Morland's degree, of course, went overboard; his name was taken off the University books with some sense of disgrace; and his father, a distinguished Royal Academician, then insisted on his taking up his own branch of art as his profession, and cut off his son's supplies until he had acceded to his wishes and put his shoulder well to the wheel. Probably, if his talents, or, as we have already said, his genius—his astonishing gifts and feeling for form and colour, and the aptitude for the manual labour required—had been a whit less striking, Leopold Morland would have thrown his palette and brushes after his degree, and have gone recklessly and pleasantly to the dogs. Happily, he was saved from this catastrophe; and

when once the mighty leverage of interest had achieved hanging his picture—and hanging it much more advantageously than those of far more deserving men—on the magic walls, the younger Morland's fame bid fair to eclipse his father's and to make him really a name. All that was wanting now was that persistent study and diligence in genuine hard work, without which, in art as well as in science, aptitude and feeling are only fleeting and perishing gifts.

Nasmyth had for the present mastered his premisses, if in trigonometry there be any premisses, and clutched his result exactly as he was clutching with his left hand the thick flakes of his hair. He wrote down certain figures, signs, and memoranda, and then threw himself back in his chair with a sigh of relief. Both the men were at work in the large upper room assigned them at Cabridelle, which was bare of everything like bedroom furniture, except the mere beds and a bench on which a pair of great brown pans and two-handled jars represented Provençal washing-apparatus. But the floor was as clean as hands could make it, the windows were garlanded with roses, and the air that blew in was laden with their fragrant odour.

Nasmyth watched his friend at work for some time, with his clasped hands thrown back behind his head, and then he said, “What's my thought like, Leo?”

Morland stooped to mix two colours which seemed to give him more trouble than usual, and then said, in

a voice unlike his own ringing tones, "Why do you ask that just now?"

"Because there is something more than usual in your mind, and I should like to know what troubles you."

"'Troubles are pleasures sometimes,' according to Mrs. Brown," replied Leo, with a slight laugh. "I have no special trouble, Harry. Dear old fellow! you're always looking out for rocks ahead of Telemachus."

"The right thing for the man at the wheel to do, ain't it? To tell the truth, I do see a whole reef of rocks just now, Leo, and I think, if you speak honestly, you are seeing them too. We came here for two days, after that calf-muzzling business, and we have been here just a month."

"Well!" rather defiantly broke in Leo. "Have I wasted my time? I have never drawn so fast or so well. I have never cut out four works to such advantage before. I have a whole case of sketches for 'lights'; and just come and look at this!"

"I will, presently, when you have looked at *my* picture. If your drawing or your Academy thing were the one thing to live for, I should not have a word to say; but there are higher things, I suppose, in a fellow's life than just his trade. There is himself and his own climbing up or falling down. I am really afraid about that dear little girl, Leo, that's the truth. If she should get to care for you, what an awful mess it would be!"

"*If*," repeated Leopold, with a slight scornful emphasis. "Or if she should get to care for you, old fellow, how would it be then?"

"Don't joke just now, Leo; you know what I mean."

"Oh, I do know indeed, dear old Conscience. I wish I didn't. I'm not absolutely a beast, though I'm often very near it. But it's all—— By Jove! she is so pretty. Look here! is not this like her?"

Nasmyth got up to inspect the watercolour drawing Morland was doing for his "*Academy thing*." It was true that he had never been so diligent or alive to the vigour of labour before. The stimulus of more emulation or ambition would never act upon Morland as it acted upon more purely intellectual men. It was necessary for his heart, or perhaps, it should rather be said, his feelings, to be touched before his full energies awoke and asserted themselves with power. He had chosen for his subject Jeanne d'Arc before her accusers, combining his group with more aim at aesthetic completion than accurate historical detail. The "*Black Duke*," Bedford, was standing leaning on his two-handled sword, with a face of splendid serenity and power. Next him sat the Bishop of Beauvais in his purple soutane and a fur-trimmed mantle, mingling characteristics of meek craft with determined cruelty. His eyes were fixed upon Jeanne, and his long, subtle, transparent hands seemed to clutch at his chain and cross as if they were already clutching her in their steel grasp. In Bedford's noble face there was not a possibility of cruelty, and his

large eyes were fixed upon the "Maid" with profound pity, though politically he had resolved upon her doom. The Bishop's face, on the contrary, showed the determination to punish her with torture, if possible, because she had resisted his despotic will. Jeanne stood in complete armour, with her head bare, and with her joined hands clasped on her sword. Her beautiful, dusky hair streamed over her shoulders, her lips were just parted as if to speak, her large hazel eyes looked out, as if in infinite pity as well as infinite appeal, upon a hard and unjust world. It was the face, and eyes, and very expression of Noël, as she looked when absorbed in thought upon some of the inexplicable mysteries of life.

"Yes, that is she, sure enough! This is by far the best thing you have ever done, Leo," was Nasmyth's criticism.

"Is it not?" said Leopold, looking up at him exultingly, as he leant back in his straw chair. "It was worth coming so far for, now, wasn't it, to get just that face?"

"The picture certainly is. But if it were to end in the misery of that face, Leo, I'd sooner you burnt the canvas and never touched a brush again."

"Touched a brush! Why, old fellow, I'd break them all and throw them into the fire myself. Aye, and all my pictures to boot. But why should our *Croix d'Amour** be made miserable?"

* A little aster so called, very common in the Camargue.

“ Could you marry her, Leo ? ”

“ Well, I really don’t see why not—I don’t see the impossibility, I mean.”

“ Not see ? Why, could you possibly live on what you make for yourself, Leo ? Should you be willing to live without your present comforts ; and I believe you have scarcely any margin now even for yourself ? ”

“ Most conscientious and discreet Chancellor of my Exchequer, alas ! it is too sadly true that I have no other ‘ margin ’ than that of unsatisfied wants. But I might be able to live as a married man abroad.”

“ But you would not like to settle down here, Leo. It is very well to come gipsying about now and then with a camp-kettle, but it would not advance your interests if it were for life. Men out of sight very soon slip behind the stream of London memories, and then good-bye to their fame. They may keep on clutching at the boughs on the river banks for a while, but they can never really row themselves up again to the mark of those who are always present.”

“ You are right there, Harry. It is the hardest work in the world to fetch oneself up even after a few months’ absence, and if one is not waiting all ready to scrape and grin when the season begins. It is a heartless old city, that same London.”

“ It is a grand old city, as full of breathless life as the Olympic games,” replied Nasmyth. “ All that is required to live there is to be well oiled and to be ready waiting in the ring. There is no capital in the

world, after all, where the race so really crowns the swift, and the battle the strong. But you must strain your muscles and have your lungs in order, and you must *not* start with a clog. Why not first make your name, and then look out for the reward of marriage?"

"Why not? why not? Well, I'll tell you why," said Leo, throwing down his brushes and palette, and getting up excitedly. "Because I love Noël Privas, dear old Harry, and—I think—well, I think that she loves me!"

"You have not told her so? Oh, Leo! could it be fair to her or honourable to her father?"

"What it is the most honourable to do I cannot imagine. I was trying to unravel just that skein when you spoke to me a while ago. I can never go away silent, feeling as I do; and if I speak, of course there ought to be more to follow."

"Better be silent for ever than give hopes that must either be at once quenched or die out miserably," said Nasmyth. "I wish to God we had never come!"

"Dear old fellow, don't take it so dreadfully to heart! You know I'm bound for ever to be in some scrape, and it might have been infinitely worse. Something will turn up yet. You know I'm one of the Micawber family."

Nasmyth could not control his wonder, as he fixed his serious brown eyes upon the face of Jeanne d'Arc, and read there the whole drama of the living Noël's

love. There was its counter-type. The heroic fight guided throughout by the loftiest impulse of a devout maiden heart ; the self-sacrifice which would revel in the toil and peril ; the treachery, the revelation of the broken reed to which she had trusted, the torturing rack, the unspeakable anguish which would crown that death with the lasting beauty born of heroic trust and pain mastered by love. As Jeanne was there pictured, leaning on her sword and looking to the years to come only for justice and righteous judgment, so would Noël look when her love-dream should lie broken at her feet.

And Morland could so paint the consequences of his own acts, without feeling or knowing the least what he did ! Nasmyth slowly turned from the picture with a face so pained, that even Morland's soft, light nature was touched to the quick. He knew and valued the weight of his friend's opinion, and throwing his brushes into the pan of water on the floor beside him, he said, "Come, old fellow, let us pull up sticks directly, and carry our goods to some other place ! I can't bear you to look so scrumptious as all that. I must see both Les Stes. Maries and Aigues Mortes. Let us slope away to one or other at once, and then there'll be an end of it all !"

"Leo, you're a regular brick at heart !" gladly exclaimed Nasmyth. "Yes, that will be our best plan, after all ; if a month's feelings can't be mastered, I know nothing of men or women or life. But do let it

be in earnest, Leo, this time, and I'll help you to put up your traps."

"No, no, thank you! Your own head is excellently well packed, I know, and I am sure your knapsack is too; but I can't stand my brushes having all their noses flattened, and the water-colours clapped face to face. But if you'll go out and see about the distances, and landmarks, and so on, without letting where we're going be visible to the naked eye, it would be time well spent."

"I'll find up old Privas, and get a map well into my head," said Nasmyth; and he took down his broad-leaved hat from its nail and went out.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW LEOPOLD MORLAND OBEYED HIS CONSCIENCE.

LEOPOLD's face drooped as the door closed upon the man whom he had, during the time of their late companionship, re-christened by the name of "My Conscience," a name well-known and dear to him in his schoolboy and college days. It was no doubt well for him to possess such a support and strength, and well also that he did not engender upon it any secret jealousy and dislike of the very hand that was at once a hindrance as well as a guide. Hitherto, no such contemptible feeling had debased his nature, or dragged him down to the lower depths of ingratitude and thankless repugnance to benefits freely given. But there was no security that some such root of bitterness would not spring up; for whenever any of us lean upon a conscience or strength outside our own—short of the highest—and strive to make it fulfil the functions which can only really be performed by our own individual moral energy and will, it is sure to

avenge our cowardice by chafing and burthening us, turning out either a lifeless weight or a gnawing chain upon our hands. And if the cowardice is inherent, and the moral nature too sickly to revive, the burthen of the external conscience is either borne and repaid by malignant hatred, or it is cast off by evasion and deceit. These evil fruits had not by any means yet ripened in Morland, but the germs were formed and set, and were likely soon to evince a hot-house growth in that shallow, friable soil.

He slowly drew his arms out of his painting blouse, and drew it over his head, put together his dry brushes, pencils and tools, and threw them into the round case he always travelled with, rolled up his sheets of paper, and left nothing but the small portable easel and the drawing upon it. He looked at it lingeringly and fondly, partly the fondness of his own proud success, partly a finer kind.

“Not half so beautiful as she is—my Provence *muscadélo!* (rose). How can I ever leave her here to blow in a garlic bed? And why should I? He is a good fellow, the best fellow in the world; but how can a mathematician be any judge of Provence roses? And then, can’t I do as I like? Who’s to hinder? If I choose to live a gipsy life, as he calls it, what is it to Jones, Brown, or Robinson? I could live abroad very well, and take home a picture regularly, to astonish the world. Look at L—— and G——. Are their things less valued because they live in ‘foreign parts?’

Harry is too John Bullish in his ideas—too groovy. Artists must always have a certain fling. And then, what a spur to have such a wife as that to urge one on ! To be sure, I must lose all chance of a wife for society—and then there is little Car Chetwynd and her money, and I think—I think she would marry me. Think ! By Jove ! I'm sure of it. My father wishes it too, I know, and this affair he would call ‘the world ill lost for love.’ But still, in marriage above all other things, one ought to be as free as air. Infernal nuisance that people should have to marry at all ! Why not have two or three wives, all in different places ? And why not do without marriage altogether, and just take up as one happens to love ? I declare I think a free love settlement in the far west is the right sort of thing for men. I wonder what Noël would say to me now ? By Jove ! and I had quite forgotten she was a little Papist ! Perhaps she would not marry a Protestant, let alone a Christian Socialist, or whatever it is that I am. There'd be the priest, and the ‘sacrament,’ and marriage in her own church. Oh, confound it all !”

He flung himself off to the window, there gathered a rose, and after pricking his finger savagely with a sweet, large red blossom, hastily pulled a delicate half-blown flower, vividly pink at the heart, shaded off lighter towards the rim, and with a crumpled, tissue-paper look that made it extremely lovely. This rose had not a single thorn, but then

it had not either a particle of smell. As Leo was curiously observing this to himself, and idly casting his eyes across the broad widths of silvery sand, his face suddenly lightened with pleasure, and leaning out of the window, he imitated exactly the call of the thrush, then quickly drawing himself in, he threw on his hat and rushed down the ladder-like stairs, and out of the ever open door into the orchard.

A strange, wild sort of orchard it was. Orange trees, cultivated for their flowers only; almond trees, whose flowers were now going by; mulberry trees for the silkworms, whose stript boughs even added somewhat to the wild southern grace of the tangled wilderness. As in all the oases of the Camargue, the irrigated fertility, like that of Egypt, was rankly luxuriant. Lucerne and various sorts of clover and trefoil, self-seeded, sprang underfoot, and roses and vines twisted themselves round the mulberry trees, hanging down again in cascades of blossom and budding fruit. In this orchard Noël was standing on a short step-ladder, shaking orange blossoms into a large sheet, and as the gentle movement of the loaded boughs sent down a continuous shower of snowy petals, the girl and her framework of orchard, and her occupation, made at once a poem and a picture which must have satisfied the most fastidious eye. She was singing in a clear, high treble, one of those strange, caustic old rhymed proverbs which, like many other things, have been preserved in Provence from the days of "le bon Reignier,

rei de Jerusalem, de Arago, di ambas las Sicilias et de Valencia" (*Valence*).

"Qui sages hom sera
Ici trop ne parlera"
Ce dist Salomon.
"Qui jà mot ne dira
Grant noise ne fera,"
*Marcol lui répond.**

When she heard the thrush call, she suddenly ceased her song, threw back her head till her long curved lashes rested against her brow, and her liquid, wonderful eyes looked radiant with delight. Her lips parted a little, her soft cheek slightly tinged, and her fine nostrils dilated as if she were about to spring into the air. Seeing Leopold disappear from the window, she bent down her head again and busied herself with her work as before, one small ear growing scarlet as she heard him brushing the grass with his firm quick steps.

"Birdie! where are you? Why are you perched so early on the orange trees? What are you doing there, little one?"

"Gathering the orange blossoms for the distiller, sir. Our trees here are only good for flowers."

"And why so? What becomes of the fruit, Noël?"

"The oranges scarcely ever ripen, sir; when they do, they are only wild, bitter oranges, fit for nothing but a sort of candy."

Noël bent her head further into the orange tree, and a thick shower of fragrant petals fell. Leopold had

* *Salomon et Marcoul*—an old Provençal poem.

stretched himself at full length in the grass, and after a pause he said, "Perhaps there are some lives like that, Noël, which never yield any ripe fruit. Still, the sweet flower is something. I am sure *this* is worth having. I do really believe that I have sagaciously hit upon something worth drawing out. Noël, I wish you would leave off shaking your trees for five minutes, and sit down on the step of the ladder and listen to me. Can you?"

Noël looked at him in surprise, but she had somehow fallen into an unconscious way of obeying Leopold's wishes, regarding him as some strong, blessed influence whom she must obey, just as certain flowers turn their petals or fold them up when the sun goes down. She came gently down the few steps of the ladder, and sitting down on the lowest, folded her small brown hands over one another in her lap, waiting with every nerve expectant for the words that were to come.

"You know, Birdie"—Morland began—"but no, you don't know—never mind." Then struggling against the strong fascination of the moment, he began again, "Noël, you know that I am a painter who paints pictures for a living, just as your father farms for a living. But there is this difference, or rather there are these two points of difference between us. Your father makes his farm pay him very well, and gets rich; and my pictures do not pay very well yet. I think they will pay by-and-by, but it takes some time to make

a name. And then your father and your grandmother and you have all been used to work and to live like working people from childhood, which makes it come easier to you. I have never, till quite lately, been used to work at all, and I do not like work, I am sorry to say, for its own sake or for long together. I like to have plenty of money, and to be free, and to work only when I am in the mood. I want to travel, and to see strange countries and people, and to be free to paint only when I think I can do it well. I have never cared much about money till now."

He paused suddenly, and Noël looked up.

"Until now? Yes, sir, you mean that now you wish to have more things and to be rich. But your pictures are very beautiful, sir; I think noble lords and gentlemen will give a great many napoleons for them. It is much pleasanter to paint than to live by a farm, sir."

"Is it, Birdie? I am surprised you should say that. I like nothing better than to see you about the farm gathering leaves and fruit and flowers, as you are doing now."

"Yes, sir, just this is all very well," replied Noël, drawing herself up with a long breath; "but there are so many times when I am tired! I am tired of the fowls, and of the goats, and of spinning; and I want to learn and to have many books, and to see other places too. I have always longed so much to go up among the mountains which we see sometimes out

there with snow on their peaks. There is such a large world somewhere out beyond them, and I want to see it. I should like to see great churches, such as you showed me in your photographs, and to hear the bells and the organ. There are so many beautiful things in the world that I have never known, and I want to see some of them before I die."

"My dear little Birdie, so you shall ! You shall see lovely things and places long before then. Don't talk about dying, please, but listen again to what I am going to say. I thought it right to tell you about my poverty and work, because I want you to see why I must go away."

"Go away ! Are you going away ?" asked Noël, starting forward, clasping her hands sharply together, and speaking almost with a cry.

"My sweet child, I must go," replied Leopold, deeply moved at her evident distress. "I must go to several other places in Provence before I can get into a ship at Marseilles, and go on to Italy. I really want to go into Italy before I go back to England, and show my picture in the great gallery I have told you about. If it is sold I shall have a good deal of money, and with some of it I shall come back here and see you again. That must be next year, Noël, but what I want now is to say that you must not forget me."

"Next year ! A whole year !" exclaimed the child, riveting her lovely, pleading eyes upon him, without

the least knowing that he read her love for him in their depths.

"Noël, my own darling, then you do care about me, don't you ?"

"Care ? oh, how I do !" murmured the girl, still as if in a dream.

"And I love you, my sweet red rose, more than anything else in the whole world !"

"Yes ?" whispered Noël, her eyes drooping under his.

"But as I have just told you, darling, people who love each other must still have something to eat, and a roof over their heads, and I cannot marry till there is some chance of at least food to eat and shelter."

"Take a little farm and live out here," slowly murmured Noël, still as if in a maze, fixing her glorious eyes again upon him.

Leopold could no longer withstand the temptation. He put his arm round her, and said, laughing, "You darling bird ! We should be like Adam and Eve in Eden, only we should have nothing to live on but olives and bitter oranges ! No, my sweet one, that is a mere woman's dream. Men are rough, practical creatures who have to hew and carve out ways and means. But look at me, *muscadélo*," he said tenderly, turning her face round to him. "Will you wait for me ? Will you and can you bear to wait and keep yourself for me while I go to Italy and back to England, and try to get my father to allow me some

money just to start with? Will you be patient for my sake, and promise me before I go away not to marry any one else? But stay, Noël, stay—is there not some one else whom your father wishes you to marry, some one who could give you a home at once, and be good to you? Tell me, little one."

"I shall never marry him!" flashed out Noël, suddenly disengaging herself from Leopold. "I told my father I would never marry Rambert, and I told him so too!"

"Did he ask you, Noël—that giant of a cattle-guard? My sweet love, that would indeed be mating a bird of paradise with a grizzly bear!"

"I shall never marry him!" Noël passionately exclaimed, again getting up and leaning against the orange-tree stem; "and you have no right to speak as if I should. If you go away I shall never be married at all!"

"My sweet one, that is talking foolishly. If I go away it will only be to get ready for our marrying. How will you like to live in black, dirty London, I wonder, with no orange or almond trees, and no blue sky?"

"It will be blue—it will be beautiful always with you," murmured Noël; "but I shall never see it. If you go away I shall never see you any more."

"My sweet little bird, I would take you with me if I could," said Leopold, getting up and taking both her hands, "but that is utterly impossible. I have

not money enough even to take us both home. Now, look here, and listen, Noël ; this ring was my mother's, and is the only one I have in the world. I am going to put it on your little finger and pledge you my solemn troth. When I come back, it is on this very same finger that I shall put your marriage ring. You are not obliged to wear this openly before every one, and perhaps it will be best not, but hang it round your neck with a little cord. Now give me your hand."

He took the passive little brown hand, and slipping the massive gold ring with one large pearl on her finger, Leopold said, in deep, tremulous tones, "*Noël Privas, I, Leopold Morland, promise to come back to make you my wife, and here plight you my troth with this ring.* Now, repeat these words after me, '*I, Noël Privas, will take no other man than you, Leopold Morland, for my husband, and plight my troth by wearing this ring.*'"

Noël murmured the words after him, and she had scarcely finished when Leopold clasped her passionately in his arms, and kissed her eyes and lips again and again, saying, "Nothing can ever part us now. Noël, except yourself !"

Noel raised her eyes to his with one long, beautiful, trusting look, never to be forgotten, and then, breathless and scared, she loosed herself from him and ran into the house.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FRUIT OF THE TREE.

IT is a well-known fact that a few hours may so change, or influence, or reverse our whole life, that men have often felt as if they had ceased at night to be the same people they were at the beginning of the day. The sun is going its usual course, and will presently slope towards its westerly. The old, familiar walls are round us, and the shadows of leafy boughs will gradually creep along them. The same dog, the family friend of years, will curl himself comma-shape for joy, and thrust his head into our hand for the accustomed caress. But within our heart and mind things are so changed with us, that we doubt whether life is real, or whether we are dreaming some dream. And if this change springs even from an overwhelming joy, there is in it so intense a sadness, or awe, that it has in it a distinct flavour of grief.

Noël was testing this truth now. She had fled, scared, from Leopold's tumultuous wooing, partly with a maiden's true coyness of shame, but also because her

very soul seemed grasped by some shadow that caused her intense dread. She had taken refuge in her little room upstairs under the roof, sitting on her pallet bed, and pressing the ring so hard that it had stamped the finger it encircled with its broad band. That broad, chased band and the round, smooth pearl seemed to tell her that her past self was dead and buried, and that new chapters of existence were soon to be unfolded and read. That old, formless, uncreated world of life, with its great peace, and primal innocence, and still waters, was indeed closed and put away. And who would whisper to her of the wild changes, the tumultuous joys, and the unspeakable anguish to be unrolled in the book which now lay closed before her? A shadow of dread indeed had even now fallen upon her. What would her father say when he knew for certain that she had promised to marry an English Protestant, whose home was far beyond even the dim, distant world of Paris? And what would Père Maurel, the Oblate father at Aigues Mortes, say to her when he should hear that she was about to marry a Protestant? Even Noël herself felt a shiver run through her as the "Alps upon Alps" of future consequences to her act began to rise in filmy visions before her, as if to carry her away from everything she had hitherto most prized and loved. How many a one besides Noël has been obliged to learn that when a weakened or unawakened will has caused the first slipping away from a solid mooring, circumstances swiftly glide in

between the swimmer who is drawn away by the current, and the firm shore he has left behind him !

“ The present we fling from us like the rind
Of some sweet future, which we after find
Bitter to taste.”

Her father must of course be told ; but what of Père Maurel ? He would probably refuse her absolution if she persisted in marrying Leopold. And how could she give him up ? And if she told Leopold himself, what would he say ? “ Foolish little child ! cut your cross old priest, and have nothing more to say to him.” It would not be the first time in his gentle, lazy rallying, that Leopold had told her this. And, if Père Maurel insisted, could she give up Leopold now ? Could she ? The very thought seemed to tear her heart in twain. No : the troth was plighted, the precious betrothal ring was firmly set on her finger, and she would be faithful to him to the end. The very thought of Rambert, and of the simple, rough country life she would have had to lead with him in his *traudou* and among his cattle, made her shudder with horror.

The growth which sprang from the fruit of the tree of knowledge was truly a tropical growth ; and although the sinister promise of knowing evil as well as good was not veiled, to be “as gods” overpowered all the natural shrinking from it. And so Noël, now, felt her roots striking down, and her branches stretching forth to unknown spheres of evil consequence and bitter fruit, while still the lying promise of a certain

godlikeness of knowledge, and new realms of passion and feeling, swept her onward with an ever increasing current.

Leopold also, having eaten of the same fruit—though with less awakened conscience than Noël—was now going through those phases of suffering which may be likened to growing pains of the body. He had not at first intended anything but to amuse himself with Noël. He had wished to take her picture as an abiding model of the Cisalpine southern type of women—that delicate, mobile, pallid, unsensual type which embodies the Mexican or Peruvian pictures of the Madonna. The childish or fairy face with those passionate, deep eyes, always freshly telling the story of feeling—a kind of heart epic which, like rich colour harmoniously blended, never wearied his eye or mind. And, of course, one of the special snares and temptations of art lies in this fascination of the subject to the forgetfulness of consequences. When Leopold had first sat watching Noël's slight, fragile, harmonious figure, as she gathered mulberry leaves, or shook down orange blossoms, or unwound her slight, glossy silk strands from the cocoons, he had not thought for a moment what effect it might have upon her. With true masculine selfishness, he would jest and dally with her in his gentle, coaxing way, learning fragments of Provençal or teaching her English words, without a thought of how the mesmerism of such new intercourse might awaken kin-

dred currents with fatal effect in her mind. And when he now sketched her as Nausicaa at the spring, now as Persephone gathering narcissus, and now as the Maid of Domrémy musing at her distaff over the redemption of France, his mind was solely bent upon getting the uttermost poetry and the uttermost pleasure for himself out of this new study of a Provençal girl. To him she became a poem, a frieze, a melody of deep pathos, a whole drama rich with colour. But what he was becoming to her, how her horizon was widening and brightening, and how full it had become of *mirages* like those of the neighbouring sand-plains, never troubled his fast-flowing hours. Even when Nasmyth tried to rouse him to the reality, he resisted the awakening, as a lotos-eater would resist embarking afresh chained to the oar. The reality, however, now became imminent, and was pressed upon his mind. Leopold, too, was now forced to think of his father, a brilliant, successful, much-courted Academician, who lived fully up to his large income, surrounded by his family of pretty daughters and blooming children, in a comfortable house frequented by a large and varied circle of friends and intimates. Leopold had appeased his displeasure at last by throwing himself into his own profession, and by his brilliant promise of success. But the elder Morland had not contemplated his son's marriage for many a year, if at all; for he also was selfish after his soft, worldly fashion, and liked the whole of his landscape to be

flooded with sunshine, and, as Leopold well knew, he had not earned his own marriage. As he sat now at his window, finishing his cigarette and striving vainly to clear his ideas, a deepening gloom took possession of his fair face, and at last, throwing the end of his cigarette impatiently out of the window, he gathered himself up and went to see if Nasmyth had returned.

He found him just coming upstairs to ask if Leopold would stroll along the plain to the pine wood ; and, glad to get rid of his own thoughts, he dashed back for his hat, and they set forth together.

"Well, I've got the whole route," said Nasmyth eagerly, taking out his pocket-case of the maps and directions, as they left the confines of the farm. "Here are we, you see, just at this round O ; and here we shall be, I hope, to-morrow evening, at Les Stes. Maries. We must go round some distance by these ponds, so as not to get too near the marsh smell, but I think we can still manage it. I have got the promise of two capital little aigues, and they say we can be put up quite well at Les Stes. Maries."

"Yes, I dare say, quite well," answered Leopold, like a man walking in his sleep.

"We can take a good look at the church, which seems to be curious, and at the salt plains, and perhaps stay there for the pilgrims. The great ceremony of opening the reliques comes one day next week, and I am sure you will like to see that."

"Like it ? Yes—oh, I dare say I shall."

"Why, Leo, what's come to you? Dear old fellow, you're not ill?"

"No, Harry, I'm not ill, thank you. Well, then, tomorrow we're bound for Les Stes. Maries. It's rather soon, isn't it?"

"Soon? Why, didn't we agree to leave the farm as soon as we possibly could? Leo, I'm quite sure you're ill. Why, your hand is quite burning!"

"Oh, hang it all!" exclaimed Morland feverishly enough, throwing himself down on the first pine-log within the shade of the *piastra*. "No, Harry, I'm not ill, unless to be the greatest ass in Christendom, and worse than an ass besides, is to be sick! In that way I'm sick as death."

Nasmyth stood in front of him, leaning on his mighty cane, and at Leopold's impetuous words his face became manifestly paler and more rigid as he asked, "What have you done?"

"I've done *it!*!" exclaimed Morland, hurrying his words out in a way very unusual to him. "I've done exactly that very thing you warned me against! Told Noël I loved her—asked her if she didn't love me—bound myself to take her as my wife!"

"Oh, Leo! But thank God it is no worse!" added Nasmyth, in a very low, deep voice, and evidently relieved.

"No worse? It is just as 'worse' as it can be. I hadn't the least idea of doing such a thing; I don't know from Adam now how it all came about; I think

it was seeing that she cared so much. But oh, Harry, I never thought the least *how* much—how much she *could* care ! I can't think how women can be like that, and so different from men. I wish to my heart they weren't ! I wish they could just play and joke, and go away and care nothing about one !”

“Unsay that, Leo, please. If women could do so, all that is good in the world would be gone out of it. If they were the selfish brutes we are——”

“Thank you, Harry !”

“Well, can you deny it ? Isn't it selfish to be hanging round a girl and getting all the good out of her, and when all the honey's gone, leaving her to eat her heart out ? Oh, Leo, I do wish to God we had never come !”

“Amen, Harry ! But there's no use in that now. We have come, and we have got to go, which is the worst part of it. I don't know now whether to write to my father straight off, and stay here for his answer, or go home and have it all out with him at once. You see he won't give me anything to keep house with if he ain't pleased.”

“Keep house ? Oh, don't think about that, Leo ; you must bestir yourself now, and take the house on your own back.”

“I desire nothing better, old fellow ; but still we must have something to eat to make a beginning, and, jolly as my father is with us all, he can't bear making any changes or giving up a single thing he has been used to. I think I must go home and take my picture,

which I know he will like, and then ask him if he wouldn't be pleased to have the original too. We could begin very small, somewhere in the wilds of Kensington, and work our way up, unless I were to throw up England altogether, like L——, and only send home pictures from here. We could live here for next to nothing, you know."

"Don't think of that, Leo. What sort of man is he that can't face a difficulty? You have only to finish some of your pictures now to start yourself well in your profession. And I feel sure that poor little Noël would be anything but an extravagant wife. I should take heart and go through it well now, and let your father see that you mean it."

"You are truly my 'conscience'!" exclaimed Morland, gratefully, "and the best friend that a fellow ever had. Yes, I'll go to my father and tell him all about her, and all about myself. I think, if he sees that we can be happy, and that Noël can be taught something of our ways, he will not set his face against it so much. And if he does, why then I must take the thing into my own hands."

"There is another thing that you will have to do," said Nasmyth rather reluctantly, discerning, though unwillingly, that Leopold, even at this moment, was rather talking himself up to the mark than eagerly maintaining his own position and that into which he had brought Noël.

"What is that?"

"You have not seen old Privas, have you?"

"No; you don't mean——?"

"You could not think of going away engaged to his child and saying nothing about it to him?"

"That old hind! Nasmyth, are you in earnest?"

"But, my dear fellow, will he not be your father-in-law?"

"Oh, curse it all, and Paquette my grandmother! Deuce take it, Harry, we need never see either of them again!"

"Then you will do a very wrong thing. If you are too weak to own your wife's claims, you should have let her alone altogether, and left her to her own people. And seriously, Leo, you ought now to make up your mind about this. It would be far better for you to go back to Cabridelle to-night, and say, 'Noël, we must part; I have been very wrong—it has become impossible for us to marry;' than to wear her life and heart out with half measures. Your shame about her class and people would of itself kill her with a long, lingering agony."

"How well you know her! You must have studied her very closely," said Morland, in some surprise. He was fastening his boot-lace as he spoke, or he might have seen the sudden flush and pallor on Nasmyth's face. Little did the soft, careless, self-indulgent lounger know how charming Noël's sweet childlike-ness had been to that great strong man, how easy it would have been to Nasmyth also to chat with her

as she gathered fruit and leaves, or how strenuously he had watched himself lest he should win the love of the Provençale girl as the plaything of the hour, and cast it aside when the hour was gone. Could not he, also, have gladly smoked, and dallied, and chatted under the mulberry trees in the orchard? Eating the lotos is pleasant to all men, if they choose to unbrace their armour and enjoy.

Nasmyth only said, "You had better see Privas, of course—who is by no means the boor he sometimes affects—and tell him you wish to marry Noël, but that you must return home to gain your father's permission. You need not do more, except give him references to show who you are, and that he may be sure you are and mean what you say. I think old Paquette is your friend, though I am not sure; but Privas is certainly master in his own house."

Every practical, daily-world detail that presented itself to him forced itself more and more unfavourably upon Morland; but as he was wise enough to see that his friend was helping him, in the truest manner, in every way he could, he thrust his sense of disrelish forcibly aside, and said, "Your counsel is good, O King! and I will do my best to follow it."

Then he got up from the rosemary-covered sand-heap, to which he had removed after pacing up and down for a while, and said, "In that case I must be going home, for there is no time to lose." And the two men went slowly back to the farm.

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE FRUIT OF THE TREE.

"MOTHER, where is Noël? Send her to me directly!" This sudden summons, spoken in a loud, sharp voice, startled Paquette the next morning, after the farm-labourers had gone out, and she was busily rinsing the plates and cups in the outer kitchen. It was so unusual for Nicole to interrupt her in any household work, that the old woman felt that something strange had happened, and she went out to the fowl shed and called Noël in without an instant's delay.

Noël hastily scattered the remains of her corn and refuse to the fowls, and went into the kitchen with the basket on her arm. In the other hand she held a bunch of magnificent cocoons, which she was going to unwind. She was dressed in a clean red-and-white striped skirt, with a spotless muslin handkerchief crossed as usual and pinned behind. The ring of betrothal was already fastened to a narrow black velvet tied round her neck, with the ends hidden in her dress. The consciousness of it and of her newly-

found treasure had spread soft bloom on the clear dark oval of her young cheek, and given a more bewitching softness to her eyes. In the kitchen she found her father, sitting in his boxwood chair; while Morland, leaning on the back of another chair, was standing at a little distance from him. The faces of both men showed that the atmosphere was stormy, and when Noël came in, in her young, fresh beauty, Leopold felt as if the thundery air had suddenly broken out into spring sunshine.

"Father, did you send for me?" said the girl's clear voice.

"I sent for you. Look me straight in the face. Is it true that you have engaged yourself to marry that gentleman standing there?"

Noël's face flushed to the brow as she replied, after a moment's pause, "I have promised to be his wife, father."

"Without telling thy grandmother or me, Noël?"

She came forward a few steps and knelt down before him. "Father, he asked me yesterday. I did not know the least before that he—loved me. I could not say that I do not love him, and I could not refuse him when he asked me to give him my troth. I was going to tell grandmother this morning, as soon as I had fed the fowls."

"And you want to marry a heretic, a man not a Christian? Have you considered what a sin that is? Do you believe Père Maurel will give you leave? Do

you wish to go away beyond Paris and break our hearts?"

"Father!" again appealed Noël, clasping her hands, with a face that would have melted a stone. "Father, indeed he is a Christian! You should hear him tell about the Passion and Death of Christ. And he will never hinder me from practising my own religion, and he says there are many beautiful Catholic churches in London, with candles and large Madonnas, who have altars of their own. Father! do not speak to Père Maurel. Let me go and see him myself, and tell him about the English gentleman in my own way. I think he will understand how it is, and give his consent."

"Thou art an ungrateful, unnatural child!" bitterly exclaimed Privas, with an evil light in his eyes, which looked almost murderous in their wolf-like glare. "I had arranged for thee a marriage which was Christian and good, and with a man who has a home where thy grandmother could have had a shelter in her old age, and when the work gets too heavy for her here. I had spoken about this to Rambert, the cattle-herd, who is fool enough to love thy white chit's face as if it were the Madonna's own. That marriage Père Maurel would bless, and then thou and thy children would also have been blessed to the third generation. But thou must needs go making love to a strange man behind our backs, and thou dost richly deserve to be locked up with a father's curse."

"Stop, sir!" exclaimed Morland, in such a tone that even the angry Provençal checked himself, and only glared at him without speaking. "Whatever evil words you would feel it your duty to cast at your daughter must now be spent on me. Noël is not capable of making love, as you call it, to any man, nor has she ever been underhand at all. Whatever has been wrong on that point belongs to me. She has nothing to do with it. I only have been in fault; and you must remember, sir, that in my own country men and women speak to one another first of their affection, and afterwards to their parents. Blame me, for I ought to have controlled myself and recollected that it is not so in France; but Noël is in no way to blame in a matter in which she was taken by surprise."

"And you were very wrong to take her by surprise?" retorted the fiery old man. "You were a guest in my house, and the child should have been sacred to you. And now you have gone and won her love with your fair face and soft words, just to break her heart! Père Maurel will never sanction this marriage, even if I would consent. Your own father will never agree to let his son marry a maiden of another class than his own, and it never brings any happiness with it, besides the scandal of your not being a Catholic. And why am I to see my girl's heart broken and her young days withered when she might have been a good, honest man's wife? You have been wrong, sir, and I wish to

God I had never seen your false, deceiving face within my doors!"

"Father!" exclaimed Noël, starting up, "you wrong him and me both dreadfully by these words. If he had wished to deceive you, could he not have gone away and told you nothing? Could he not even have asked me to go with him?"

"Tudieu! thou shameless minx! Wouldst thou have gone?" exclaimed Privas, starting up as if to strike her.

"Yes, father, I doubt I should," replied Noël, with perfect simplicity. "He is an honourable gentleman, whose word I trust; and if Père Maurel would not marry us, we could have been married in Paris."

"Caspé! thou brazen-faced good-for-naught! thou'st learnt thy lesson like a parrot! Suppose he had taken thee in, for which he is naught too good, and it had been no marriage at all? A fine sight thou would be, with thy good name gone, and thy father's grey hairs disgraced for ever!"

"It could not have been so, father," said Noël, not moved from her calm, though tears had gathered large in her beautiful, pathetic eyes. "He would never have done that wicked thing, because he is a good man and to be trusted in all things."

"And now, pray, sir, if I may be so bold as to speak about my own child, what do you propose to do?" said Privas aggressively to Morland.

"I have told you. I mean to go straight to London

to see my father, and as soon as I have done so, and shown my picture, to come back for my wife," replied Leopold, with a far different look at Noël at the last words.

"Indeed! And what is she to do, meanwhile?"

"Will she not stay here, as usual, making you happy and doing her duties at home?"

"Caspitello! No, indeed!" shouted the angry man. "I will not have the false, thankless minx going about the house like a soft-footed cat while she is breaking our hearts! If she chooses to abide by her foolish maggots and marry out of the Church, she shall go to her cousin, the Superior of the convent at Aigues Mortes, and live on bread and water. If after that she chooses to be wise and turn over a new leaf, and marry Lambert like an obedient good child, she shall have her father's blessing, and begin the world with the benediction also of God."

As he said these words, Privas got himself out of his chair and strode away into the orchard, where his loud voice was soon heard, chiding and giving orders to the farm men.

Morland seemed then, and then only, to waken from the kind of dream into which he had sunk. The harsh, fierce, lowering face of Privas, his uncontrolled voice, and the fury into which he had allowed himself to be lashed by passion, were all separate ingredients in the pain Morland had felt, and the difficulty of restraining himself from saying, "Man—or rather,

wolfish brute!—keep your daughter to yourself, and do what you please with her!” His soft, pleasure-loving nature, refined by its own softness full as much as by careful culture, had so revolted from these lower aspects of life, to which he was unaccustomed, except on their picturesque surface, that an absolute loathing seized him at the idea of this savage Provençal being connected with him by any ties whatever. Flirting laughingly in the sunshine, and caressing the oval cheeks and brown little hands of a round-limbed girl, is a far different pastime to uniting yourself to the same girl’s abhorrent relations, and taking their coarse, jarring life into your own. So abhorrent to his quivering sensations, in fact, were the gestures and whole bearing of this garlic-eating southern boor, that Leopold felt a kind of bound at his heart, when the last words of Privas seemed to bring him a possibility of release. And as this craven joy shot through his feeble heart, he looked up and saw Noël, like a Greek coloured statue, standing with her twisted flag basket and golden cocoons in her hands, and both hands and head drooping as if struck to the heart by her father’s words. A more touching or more exquisite picture could not be imagined, and some chivalrous blood was roused in Morland at the sight. He went across the room to Noël, and took one of her hands.

“Look up at me, sweet; do not be so unhappy. I dare say your father was only angry, and he will not really do what he says.”

Noël looked up and fixed her large, touching eyes upon him. "I was the most afraid of *your* minding it," she said, in a low voice. "I know he is angry, but that cannot make me unlove you."

"My own one! I trust not, and it can never make me unlove you, the sweetest bird that ever sang in a green tree! But listen to me, darling. You have not yet said anything to your grandmother, have you?"

"I have not had time. I was going to tell her when she called me, and even she looked scared at my father's way this morning. Oh, he is very terrible when he is angry! The men of our country are so wild and fierce, like the beasts and the untamed horses of the *téribous*. I could never love any of them as I love you—your voice is always gentle and sweet, and your eyes look so kind."

Leopold gently drew her to lean upon him, and, lifting up her head, kissed her eyes softly, and then said, "I wish you would go now, Birdie, and try to make your grandmother take your part, and tell her distinctly both what your father says and how you feel about it yourself. Perhaps she would then come and have a talk with me, which I should like much better than trying to convince your father."

"I will," said Noël, "but there is something I should like to do much better."

"What is that, *muscadélo*?"

"To go to Les Stes. Maries," said Noël. "You will laugh at me, because you do not believe yet what the

saints can do. But no one goes there without getting some good. Old Zette got her son home, who had been lost for ever so long on the Tangerine coast. She put up a silver boat when he came back, all tattered and wounded. And Manou and Lurette were married after all, though their fathers said they would rather see them both dead. Lurette went with bare feet all the way to Les Saintes, and Manou made a vow; and the silver double heart they gave is nearly the first thing you see in the lower chapel. I should like to go to Les Saintes and ask them to help us."

"The great day is next week, is it not?" said Leopold, caressing her pretty head. "Suppose you ask your grandmother to go with you, Birdie? I think it is a very good idea."

"And then I could see Père Maurel. I think he will certainly be there. I know grandmother would like me to do that," said Noël, a little as if the pleasure to herself would be a divided one. "But I am glad you wish me to go. Oh!" she exclaimed suddenly, clasping his shoulder with both hands, in the true, pretty, and most feminine way of imploring, "would you go and ask the saints yourself, and then perhaps they would give you the grace to believe the true faith, too? And *then* no one could have anything to say? Would you?"

"My sweet one! I have no objection to the saints," replied Leopold laughingly, "but as to becoming a Catholic, my child, what do you suppose my father and

all my sisters would say? It will be hard work enough to them to swallow my little Papist wife, without choking them altogether with Romanizing myself. Though, as far as that goes, it isn't altogether out of fashion just now, and artists always make themselves pretty free about religion. But you go to your grandmother, Birdie, and speak to her about all of it together."

He lifted her face for one more long, earnest kiss, and then Noël, with soft colour called into her cheeks, took up her basket and went away, while Leopold swung himself upstairs to consult his "Conscience" once more.

CHAPTER IX.

RAMBERT AGAIN.

THE earliest streaks of early dawn were barring the pure opal sky with rose, and the scarcely heaving sea appeared illimitable in its exquisite morning blue. The sand-plains of the Camargue looked almost as boundless, as the first sun-rays turned their wastes into a sheet of silver, sparkling with its minute mica fragments as if it had been sown with seed-diamond. The birds were abroad on the huge stagnant pools, swimming, diving, dressing their feathers, leading out their young broods. The Nile ibis plumed itself, as much at home as on the rocks above Philæ; the flamingo glanced through the reeds like a living flame; stately herons, ignorant of hawks, smoothed their beautiful feathers or meditated peacefully on one leg; cranes and wild-ducks of many kinds scuttled and cackled noisily, as they washed and dived with the frantic vigour peculiar to their race; and red-stockinged chevaliers looked like the College of Cardinals going to the Consulta, as they gravely promenaded the flat

shore in a row. Nothing but a salt-water bird could long have breathed such an atmosphere as that in health, for the miasma of those Camargue pools is one of the most deadly out of the Tropics. At work beside the long, shallow saltpans, or now and then looking out from the huts in which they lived, or rather just managed to exist, the salt-gatherers appeared here and there, like wasted ghosts—haunting the “circle” apportioned to them for their sins in life, and working out their bitter measure of penitential purification. Their sunken eyes looked preternaturally large, their hair had the lanky uncomeliness peculiar to the hair of sick persons, their colour was like old parchment, and their clothes hung on them as if on wooden frames. Even the customs officers of the district (*douaniers*), appointed to watch the salt-making and the coast, were continually changed, for to be stationed on the Camargue coast for any length of time was equivalent to a sentence of lingering death. There is one, now, just come out of his station, and looking over the salt plain, shading his eyes with his hand. His wife has been stricken with the marsh fever, and he is anxiously looking abroad for some messenger to send for the doctor from St. Gilles. His practised eye, however, discerns something moving across the plain, which he supposes may do as well as the doctor. Far away as the eye can reach appears some vast moving body, like cavalry on the march. At first it is white, then dimly coloured, then glancing and moving restlessly in the rays of the

sun. Then it first becomes certain that a vast herd of horses and cattle were on the march, and they soon began to sweep before the anxious douanier's eyes. First came a small herd of large handsome mules, many of whom had their hind-legs hobbled slightly, to prevent their kicking and laming their companions. They passed along, noisily braying, and biting as only mules can do, and occasionally making a rush forwards or sideways to lash out with one fore-foot, exactly like huge cats in chase of a mouse. Next to this docile and amiable party came about a hundred and fifty small horses, chiefly white, with a few grey and blue roans, with sweeping manes and tails, which they flicked with a loud whistling noise like gigantic whips. These little, wild Camargue horses, bred from the Arabs brought into Provence by the Saracens, are many of them exceedingly beautiful, with small straight heads, very fine ears, high crests, and tails well set on, and with legs as hard and sinewy as those of a Highland deer. These *aigues* are mastered with the utmost difficulty by constant companionship with their owners, who can never be quite sure that they will not roll over and over, crushing and bruising their riders to death ; after which feat they gallop off madly into the farther wilds, among the network of pools and dwarf thickets of the Lower Camargue, and return to their primitive tameless state. Very severe bits and cruel spurs nearly a foot long are used by the cattle-guards when riding them, for, like the cattle-herds of the

Pampas, the Camargascans will never go on foot. Men, women, and children, one and all, seem to be born on horseback.

After the drove of *cavades*, who formed studies of the most exquisite beauty for horse lovers, followed the oxen and other cattle, which made up the substance and staple of this moving host. Then passed by—to such as had eyes to discern—that peculiar pastoral idyll of moving herds which must have begun the world's march from Babel, as well as that of our own white race from the Hindū Koosh; and which has idealized the poetry of sacrifice and pastoral life through all the known mythologies. First came the troop of wild, fierce, long-haired kine, whom it was almost death to attempt to milk, and whose office was chiefly restricted to furnishing the herd with calves. These cows were of all shades of black and grey, with a variety of fawn with black ears. The oxen, the bellmen to the troop, were also the wisest and most self-controlled of the company. They walked up and down and round the drove, exactly like sheep-dogs, keeping the kine and calves in some sort of shape and order, and preventing the stragglers after wild rosemary, tamarisk, broom, and aster, from straying altogether out of sight. These bell-oxen, or *dondaires*, are thoroughly trained, and exhibit the most extraordinary sagacity in their work and affection to their owners. Lastly tramped the bulls and bullocks, the terrible lords and lordlings of the herd, whose size,

strength, and ferocious bearing was enough to make any but a Camargue herdman tremble. Among these hairy-breasted, wide-horned, and black-muzzled chiefs, some friends of ours could be discerned. Oriflamme, his bell tied round his neck with a new scarlet scarf, Les Rochers, marching as usual sullenly apart, with his tail wildly lashing, and a bar of wood firmly wired to his horns, and with his hind legs loosely hobbled, were easily distinguished from the rest ; and behind Les Rochers, accompanied by two great brindled dogs, rode another of our familiar friends. Rambert was mounted on Bayard, and though the herdman wore his usual wolfskin cape and broad grass hat, his hair and beard had been trimmed, his linen suit was spotlessly clean, and his long cruel spurs were clasped round a handsome pair of new untanned boots, which came up to the knee. Bayard, too, had a new bridle, with long scarlet loops at the ears ; and the wild herdman presented altogether a soldierlike, brightened aspect, which made his dark face and tall figure pleasant to the eye. As he rode along, directing his dogs and watching the progress of the herd, Rambert saw the customs officer beckoning to him, and touching Bayard with the end of the bridle, the fiery *aigue* brought him quickly to his side.

“ Is anything the matter, Pipet ? Any one carrying off the salt-squares ? ”

“ No, Rambert. I wish it were that, for then there

would be a quick remedy. Mariette is ill with the marsh fever. I suppose she was out too late last week gathering up the linen. Will you come in and look at her for a minute?"

Rambert was well known to have cured a good many of the marsh fever. He nearly always carried about with him a bitter powder which, made into tisane, cut off the fits, or brought the patient through by intense perspiration; and when he heard of Pipet's trouble, he signed to the two lads behind him and to the dogs to go forward and stop the herd, when the faithful *doublaires* stood in front of them, like the perfectly-appointed grooms at the heads of the leaders in a four-in-hand drag, thus reducing the whole moving machinery to a passive state. Then Rambert sprang off his horse, leaving it loose to graze, and went into the wretched little station. He found Mariette in a hot fit of the fever, gradually losing her self-control and becoming delirious, so that even while he was there the poor woman drifted away into unknown circumstances and vague talk, crying out in a shrill, high voice that the station was loosened from the piles and was floating out to sea, while nobody would fetch Pipet, nor lend them a stout rope.

Rambert's face, as he bent over the poor, wasted woman, became so soft and tender—the tenderness of a great heart—that if Noël had seen him then, she could not have been blind to his true worth. She must have been able to weigh the value of the pure

gold against that of the tinsel alloy. No one saw him, however, but Pipet, whose weary mind and body—for he had been up all night—seemed refreshed by the sympathy of his helpful friend. Rambert felt the sick woman's pulse, and then asking for a cup of water, he dropped into it some coarse whitish powder from a box he pulled out of his pouch; and after waiting till the water had completely absorbed it, he gave her the mixture to drink.

Mariette feebly strove to make the sign of the cross with her thin hand, in which her husband helped her and Rambert joined, and lifting up her eyes, with a silent invocation to “les bonnes Saintes,” she drank off the bitter draught. Rambert hastily filled it again, and, dropping a second portion of powder into it, bade Pipet cover it with a plate and put it aside to be given in the afternoon. He also insisted that a cup of milk, with a spoonful of lemon juice, should be given to the sick woman continually, and then, replacing his precious box in his pouch, he nodded to the grateful patient, telling her he would come again before long, and went out with Pipet, who thanked him with tears in his eyes.

“ You have no wife, Rambert, and you scarcely know what it is to have her lying there like that—but if poor Mariette gets well, there is nothing I won't do for you that a poor douanier can compass, short of letting you take away that cartload of salt. But if you like to accept a few blocks now, on my

own account, you are kindly welcome, and I should be glad and proud to give it."

"Well, I will take one square, and thank you kindly," replied Rambert. "Some of my beasts are in great want of it, and I am taking them all down beyond Les Stes. Maries, where the *ferrade* is to be held."

"The *ferrade* is to be there, is it? That is on account of the feast, I suppose? Mariette has been looking forward to that for I cannot say how long. She was to go with Paquette Privas and the rest from Cabridelle."

"Ah!" said Rambert, with a long breath. "She was to go with them, was she? Poor woman! she will not be able to get about so soon, I fear; but one never knows how soon a woman can pluck up for what she wants! Have you—have you seen anything of them lately at the farm?"

"No, I have been tied here by the leg—or rather both legs. But I heard some news from there, though, yesterday, from their old shepherd, Manicou."

"News?" repeated Rambert, who had just swung himself on to his saddle, and sharply reined back his horse so suddenly that the fiery animal reared nearly upright in the air, which did not in the least disturb his rider's position or his fixed look at Pipet.

"Well, I've heard," said the douanier reluctantly, for he instinctively felt that Rambert had some attraction to Cabridelle. "I did hear that Privas' daughter

was about a good deal with one of them foreign gentry that are lodging there—that one with a yellow beard and hair, and a woman's face. More fool Privas to let them take root like that, I say!"

He looked up almost fearfully into Rambert's face, for an absolute silence and stillness seemed to reign in the air. The cattle-herd was sitting like a statue on his horse, scarcely seeming to breathe. Suddenly his great dark eyes dilated with red fire, his bronzed face grew paler, his vast chest heaved with a convulsive movement, and uttering sharply in his mighty voice the Provençal oath, "Tudieu! let him take care!" he dashed his spurs into Bayard's sides, and bounded away like an avenging giant across the plain, leaving the mild Mentonnais* douanier scared at the sudden explosion.

Rambert rushed along over stock and stone, letting his fiery horse gallop at its utmost speed, making a sign to the herdmen to follow at their usual pace, but apparently not able at present to return to his normal state of cattle-guard which half an hour ago he was pursuing so happily. Half an hour ago this gnawing serpent, this burning flame, had not clutched at his heart, driving him to madness. Yes, he felt there was something; his heart had seemed to wander round and round Cabridelle, like a faithful watch-dog scenting and sniffing strange footsteps. This magnetic chain invariably links the lover and his beloved, even

* Native of Mentone.

if he is not loved in return. Rambert had, as it were, breathed the Englishman's presence in the air ; he had felt that there was more in Noël's rejection of him, and in what Privas had told him of her absolute certainty about her own mind, than the words had said which had weighed so heavily, though without conscious reason, upon his heart and spirits. The preparations for the *ferrade*, and consultations and arrangements about it with his owners and neighbours, had, of course, diverted his mind, and strained it in other directions, as must happen with men in their various callings. For, happily for them, love, which is woman's chief calling and interest, is only one of the multiplied occupations of men. And now Pipet's words had brought the two magnetic currents, positive and negative, in contact, and the explosion had rent the air.

While Rambert was galloping, a whole lifetime of thoughts seemed to flash through and through his mind. Should he kill this foreigner, who had stolen in like a mountain cat, to carry off his beautiful singing bird ? Should he reproach her with her disdain and her ingratitude to his love and the home he had been so carefully preparing for her, and then should he kill the man before her face ? He seemed, in the vivid picturing of strong passion, to act it all out. He saw himself before those two—the Englishman and Noël—and he heard the indignant ring of his own voice and words. He saw the tall, fair man fall at his feet, and then he himself rushed at Noël, caught her

in his arms, and kissed her frantically, even while she struggled from him and looked at him with an abhorrence for which she had no words. He did not care the least for this. It seemed to him that he *had* seized her in his arms and clasped her to him with all his force, and kissed her sweet lips once, whether she would or no. This thought gave him a sort of fierce joy, which was almost akin to the wildest hate.

Or should he kill himself? Should he go and reproach her, as in his former inward drama, for her thankless scorn and rejection of an honest, true love, and then should he kill himself before her, so that his death-image should always haunt her life till her dying day? Or, before dealing the last deadly stroke to his own life, should he stab her to the heart, and thus force her to go with him to another world, though she scorned his companionship in this one? Somehow or other, this horrible injustice should be horribly punished; and as Rambert flew along the level sands, unconscious of the burning heat, every evil passion seemed to be churned up in his mind, and to stir up his soul to the bitterest thirst for revenge. But at last his gallop came to an end, and as he reined up Bayard, covered with foam, Rambert found himself in one of the wildest spots of the neighbourhood. Before him lay a considerable wood of the Camargue dwarf oaks, which are so small and low that it might have been a fairy wood, and underneath this miniature forest was a thick growth of stunted broom and

lavender. In this grove, upon a pile of very picturesque rocks, torn in some primeval age by the primeval Rhone from the Alps, was perched a ruined hermitage, the dwelling of one of the numerous hermits of the Merovingian era in France, when the missionary spirit, that had been driven from the courts and capitals of France by their vices, took refuge in the wild forests and wildernesses of the provinces. The rude carving on the broken arch of the belfry turret was still remaining, for in that sun-baked region the decay of damp is unknown, and even ruins are preserved like mummies, without apparent lessening or change. Within the hermitage chapel a crucifix had been rudely carved in the wall stones, and, though worn and smoothed by time, the Figure was still there, wearing in the set and droop of the head an expression of willing suffering that might win a prayer even from the most careless passer-by.

Rambert left his panting horse free to browse upon the aromatic shrubs, and threw himself down on the heap of stones in front of the ruin. At first he buried his face in his hands, giving himself up to the gloomiest thoughts—the gloom which succeeds the fierce glow of passion, as piles of cinders and ashes are the result of a blasting-furnace in full glow. Then he looked up wearily, and his eyes fell upon the Figure on the cross, at first, as on any other object, then as if it suggested thoughts to his mind.

The cattle-guard was profoundly ignorant. He had been, of course, baptized, and before he was eight years old had been taken to the Curé of St. Chamas to make his first confession, for which he had been chiefly instructed by answering a set form of questions by set words of answer, most of which he did not understand. The Curé was a fairly good old man, of a by-gone day, very particular in requiring that the children should all make their first confession after they were seven, and their first Communion before they were twelve years old, and that the boys should be prepared for these duties by himself. The girls, who were handed over to some convent of Sisters, fared a good deal better; for women only, as a rule, understand and can put themselves in communication with children's minds. When Rambert had been prepared for his first confession, he had been taken to one of the side chapels of the parish church, where he was bidden to sit on a low bench with other boys of his own age, some of whom had marbles, some tops, some *dragées* and *pralines*, in their pockets or hands. The Curé had sat in front of the bench, which of course had its back to the altar, with a cane in one hand and his snuff-box in the other; but as he was very blind, and extremely kind-hearted, the cane was seldom used, while the snuff-box was in constant requisition. The questions had been put round to each boy, and each boy had made the answer rattling it off, as far as his powers of memory carried him, at a racing-pace, getting louder

towards the end. As the last word was successfully shouted out, the whole bench of boys showed all their white teeth in a grin of satisfaction, and the exulting candidate instantly subsided upon the fingering of his marbles, or playing at surreptitious cats-cradle, while the “goodies” went the general round.

The examination, or preparation for the first communion, at twelve years old, though made of course with more care and watchfulness, was pretty much of the same character. Rambert was then older, more thoughtful and reasoning, and, it must be added, more impatient of control, and more doggedly resolved to carry out his own wishes. As he had been respectably born, and had relations well to do in St. Chamas and at Arles, the Curé had offered to send him to college, and bring him forward for the priesthood, talking to him a little himself about the vocation to the altar and the supreme offering to God of the whole future life. Rambert, in answer, had asked one or two questions with the most naïve audacity of M. le Curé himself.

First. “What sort of place was college?”

Secondly. “Did priests ever have horses of their own, and ride?”

Being told that college was a school for big boys and young men; and that horses and riding were quite out of the question for priests, except when they were occasionally made use of in mountainous countries and for long distances, Rambert instantly decided against having anything to do with such a calling

He did exert himself so far as to master all the Communion questions, and with great gravity and propriety of demeanour made his first Communion. A genuine feeling of awe then possessed him at the reality of the sacrament, and, as far as he knew, he did his best to receive it worthily, while acknowledging that he was most unworthy. *As far as he knew*, for the poor boy was lamentably ignorant of the life, and words, and any real knowledge of Him Who was hidden in the sacrament, and the mere repetition of certain prayers and religious formulas became barren of any fruit, while the awe was too uncomfortable a thing to be risked oftener than it could possibly be helped. Like so many more of his countrymen, therefore, Rambert had bidden farewell to his religion at that stage, casting off its outer practice as a shell, to be taken up again and put on, it might be, in some future time of great need and trouble, or at the approach of death ; but never to be the light and law of his path, or the rod and staff of his lifelong journey. His natural reason urged him to be honest and clean-living ; and his conscience dimly suggested to him neither to wrong his employers, nor to injure their property ; and his own natural characteristics made him more merciful and forbearing than many of his comrades. He had first served a short time in the army, and then had chosen to return to his native plains and take service with a large owner of horses and cattle. His enormous strength and agility, his hardy and tem-

perate habits, and his love of the animals he tended, made him famous in the Camargue ; and more than one pretty farmer's daughter would gladly have been chosen to be his wife, and his companion or help in his toilsome occupation. But it was a calling which tended to roughen and harden Rambert's natural qualities, instead of bending them to softer influences ; and he had been so absorbed in his struggles and victories with the fierce animals under his charge, that no room was left for any desire for a pleasant home and woman's companionship, which would have made him a changed man. Once only, in his wild, turbulent, hurrying life, he had been struck to the heart, and that was when he had, one morning of the past year, seen Noël at the outer farm-well, drawing water for the kids that were too young to be turned out. As the brown, thirsty man, and more thirsty, fiery grey horse had come up to the well, Noël, like Rebecca, had "hasted" and lowered her pitcher, and given them both to drink. The grace and the smile and kindly glance of the clear young face and shady eyes had burst upon Rambert as a direct vision from heaven. All his better thoughts and softer feelings were then brought to the surface, all his truthful, generous uprightness had been stirred, together with that mercifulness and tenderness for the weak, which are a brave man's essential characteristics. Noël might have done anything with him, might have raised him to any loving height ; deepened the foundations of his faith, and

widened his brotherly relations with all men. But she had wandered away after a phantom light, and both lost herself and the soul which had been given to her to reverence and lead her out of herself. No woman can tell the number and variety of consequences which may close round one of her rash acts. No woman can tell how, in making choice of a false love instead of a true, she may drag down other souls besides her own, and make them also eat the Dead Sea fruit she has chosen for her own portion.

Rambert was at this moment in a mood which even his own worst enemy, had he one, might pity. His dark face was the symbol of his mind, through which a driving wreck of storm and darkness raged. Why was every one else to be happy, while he was given up to failure and despair? Why was another man's tree to bear a harvest of ripe lemons, while from his, so long watched and pruned and nourished, came only the little barren blights which had now fallen on the ground? Who was this Englishman, that he was to drink all the best vintage, while even a drop was grudged to one who had watched the ripening of the grapes? Anyhow, he should not long be walking there in his pride and beauty, with his yellow beard like unwound silk. A puppet, a doll, which he could chuck into the Rhone with one lift of his hand! Instinctively he raised his head proudly and looked up, and as he did so his eyes met the worn, drooping Figure on the broken cross. Rambert started, as if

he had never seen a crucifix before, and certainly it was long since that once familiar image had met his eyes. The pierced hands, the pierced feet, the wounded side, then came confusedly to his mind, and the faith of his childhood seemed revived and brightened again in his memory. The love which offered and the love which the offering wrought, brought back the long-disused words of prayer, and Rambert felt rather than said, "*As we forgive them that trespass against us.*" He knelt on the scanty aromatic herbage, a great softness came into his face and changed it as he looked steadily at the crucifix, and he said, "I have nearly forgotten—'Our Father, Who art in heaven—forgive us our trespasses—as we forgive'—— Can I? —'As we forgive them that trespass against us.' "

CHAPTER X.

THE MORLANDS IN GENERAL.

THE breakfast-table was laid in a pleasant, roomy house in Montagu Square, and the very shining of the bright silver and china, and the snowy, speckless cloth, with the pretty chased kettle and lamp, told of the comfortable condition of the inmates of the house. A pile of letters lay beside the freshly cut and ironed *Times*, but no one was in the room, which was hung with a few good modern pictures, of recognized value. Presently the patterning of a dog's feet was heard on the floorcloth outside, and a white, rough terrier, with upright ears, and a few iron-grey marks that made him look like a gigantic flint, trotted briskly into the room, followed by a slight girl, rather above the middle height, with wonderful green-grey eyes.

"No one down, Juan! What can they all be doing this morning? I wonder if the tea is made?"

She peeped into the teapot, and found that the excellent Stone had not failed in his duties, whatever his betters had to say for themselves. The girl then

lightly turned over the pile of correspondence to see if there were anything for her, while Juan sprang into a cane chair which stood near the large one at the bottom of the table, and wagged his short, rough tail consideratively, as if willing to do his best towards working out the domestic problems. Suddenly the girl started, and with a slight flush said, "Ju! here's a letter from your master." At which Juan jumped down from his chair with a short bark, and trotting to her, looked up beseechingly in her face. She held the letter towards him with eyes in which a wonderful light shone, and while Juan industriously licked the letter she softly stroked his rough head. Just then steps were heard in the hall, and a middle-aged, but well-preserved, handsome man and two more girls came into the room. The holder of the letter swiftly threw it back on the heap, her face changed like a house-front when the blinds are suddenly let down, and she said, "Good morning, Uncle Morland. What will you give me for good news? A letter from France, which Juan has been licking all over."

"From France, hey? It's nearly time. Good morning, Car. Good old Ju! bring me your master's letter."

Juan duly carried the foreign letter to the other end of the table, and the elder of the girls who had come in with her father began to pour out the tea. She whom he had called Car meanwhile sat down beside her uncle, and every now and then furtively glanced at him as he read. While the others, including a third very pretty

little girl of ten and a fine boy of seven, were all engaged with their choice between tea or coffee, and rolls or toast, Car had already discerned the darkening of Mr. Morland's face, and his hasty, irritated folding up the letter and throwing it on the table.

"Is that from Leo, did you say, Car? Papa, is there good news of his picture? How are they, and are they coming home?" asked the tea-maker, putting her pleasant, sensible face on one side the kettle and lamp.

"It is from Leo. There is good news, as far as his own word goes, of his picture. They talk of coming home in a fortnight."

"Father, there is something wrong," said Anne, the tea-maker. "Leo is not ill, is he?"

"No, dearie, not ill in body; very sick in mind, apparently. You shall see his letter by-and-by, but I don't want it all to go farther. Give me some tea, please, and something to eat—dry toast and some bacon."

It had always been the dictum of the family in Montagu Square that if the world were known to be coming to an end in the afternoon, "father" would still eat his dry toast and bacon for breakfast, and a slight smile appeared on all faces except those of Car and Anne, as the bacon dish and toast-rack were handed down the table. Juan also seemed to think that the writing of foreign letters and upsetting the family peace ought to be no hindrance to his

breakfast, and accordingly he took possession again of the cane chair always set for him, and sat up—lolling against the back of it—to receive his buttered and baconed toast upon his nose. Happily for themselves, the great union and the pleasant, light-hearted ways of the Morland family had always smoothed and sweetened many of the rubs and scratches, inevitable in a large home party without a mother's peace-giving rule. Anne, indeed, had done as much as lay in any daughter's or sister's power to stand in her mother's place; and if it had not been for one secretly counter and disturbing element, she would have succeeded in maintaining the whole household in loving peace.

The disturbing element was an orphan niece of her mother's, possessed of some considerable property, whom Mr. Morland had taken into his house and kind, generous heart for his wife's sake. Caroline—from her birth called Car—Chetwynd was exactly the age of her cousin Anne Morland, so that they had been playfellows from childhood. Her wonderful eyes and hair and pretty ways had been the delight of the artist circle of evening visits (especially of men visitors) and five o'clock teas, that chiefly made up the world in which the Morlands lived—a world where a good deal of pleasant freedom and *camaraderie* was patent, where the general mixture of children upon equal terms with their elders was usual, and where pretty children, especially, often

came to be looked upon and treated rather on the artistic than the moral side of their bringing up. In all sorts of society, indeed, the whole aspect of the general world, as far as they are concerned, is turned round. The children not only fetch themselves up, but also train or drive their parents in many ways in which they should not go, and the result varies according to the natural character of the children. The Morlands, with one exception, had grown up in most loving union and agreement; well-natured and well-mannered, worshipping their father and his profession, and affectionately devoted to their sister "Queen Anne," whom they treated as mother and sister all in one. In the case of the eldest son Leopold, the system, as has been seen, had not worked so well. The habit of unselfish sacrifice and yielding in a thousand small daily ways had not formed in the man's character as it had in the woman's, and his natural faults had been allowed to flourish full-grown and unchecked. There was a far better chance for his two younger brothers, as Anne was partly alive to Leopold's failure, and, though loving him as girls only can love the brothers whom they also admire, she was pretty well aware of the sandy foundation on which his principles and better qualities stood.

But on Car Chetwynd the loose rein in Montagu Square had acted worst of all. Her natural character was not a good one—her cleverness was very great, and her victories and love of power had developed to

such a degree, that it was only owing to the fine temper and easy, careless *laissez-aller* of the family that the others could have remained either blind or placid with her perpetual undermining and manœuvring character. Car inherited a considerable fortune from a cousin, and she was determined that her beauty and charm should add a hundredfold to its value. She knew that, though well placed in her uncle's house for happiness and comfort, or rather for a profusion of comforts, she was not so well placed for making a good marriage; and to marry well, and to have a pleasant house and a husband whose position could enable her to plan and rule in society to her heart's content, was Car's great ambition. She it was who had stirred up Leopold's lazy and latent ambition, and had finally induced him to apply himself to his father's profession; and she it was who had also prevailed upon him to examine some unknown and unhackneyed foreign region, and to strive for the prizes of fame and honourable mention by obtaining good models for a certain picturesque, sentimentally historical genre, which would win him popularity with some ease. She had given Leopold reason to think that she might be induced to marry him if he became famous and was likely to make money; and now her feelings may be in some degree imagined when she feared, and yet knew nothing of what she feared. Anne was to read the letter, too; always Anne! Do what she would — and it must be conceded that Car had had the clever-

ness to stir up a good deal of petty mischief between Anne and her father—do what she would, her uncle always came back to consulting Anne about everything of importance, while he only laughed, and joked, and amused himself with her. She would amuse him with a vengeance some day, she was thinking now, as she every now and then glanced out of her great, green-grey, heavy-lidded eyes at the letter lying so near her plate, so near the quick beating nerves and tissues of her heart! How she longed to read through that thin French envelope, and how, also, she longed to punish Leopold most bitterly for the sins which she judged him beforehand to have committed! Let no man think lightly of Car Chetwynd's tender mercies, when her singular and—materially—most beautiful eyes looked floating and liquid under their thick, curly lashes as they did now!

At last the genial, sunshiny English breakfast was done with, and even Car's genius could invent no way of further lingering beside that well-filled French envelope. In fact, the envelope was gathered up with the rest of Mr. Morland's papers. The very touch of it seemed to bring back the heavy cloud in his face. He called to Anne and bade her come to his painting-room as soon as she had seen the cook, and just nodding, with a “bye-bye!” to Car, went out of the room, little knowing what a seething whirlpool he had left behind him. Even Juan rushed scuttling after Mr. Morland, and as he did so Car gave a little nod and smile as if

some brightening idea had occurred to her. She called the boy Caryl to her for his Latin, which she always persevered in teaching him, that she might study it herself; and the dining-room was left to the undivided reign of Stone, the factotum and treasure of the family.

Anne Morland had soon "seen" the cook and given her simple orders for the early dinner and "high tea" in which her father delighted; and then, after administering a few stores, she washed her hands in the pretty little tapped basin contrived for her use in the store-room, and took her way up a few steps at the back of the dining-room to her father's sanctum, the painting-room, which to his children was a true temple of fame. It was a charming room, with a good light from above, veiled at pleasure, like an *impluvium*, with striped canvas, and filled with beautiful, quaint old furniture and accessories, given or gradually acquired from original sources. One or two marqueterie chests, with old locks and good hinge-work; one or two capital carved-tables, of a good time; brackets and tall "candle-trees" bought out of old farmhouses in the West of England. In one corner an old carved bedstead, in excellent condition. Here and there quaint chairs and stools, vases, bowls, pitchers, cups, spoons, horns, gourds of many shapes, odd Valory china, banners, tufts of grasses, reeds, canes, and corn, were all made use of in the best taste, and, while scattered in profusion, were so disposed and preserved as to be as far as possible from

having that littering, rubbishy character which disfigures many studios. Frames, canvases, and finished and unfinished sketches were ranged on a kind of ledge running round the room about a foot and a half from the floor, and thus enabling the housemaids to keep the room cleansed and dustless without moving and perilling the pictures and drawings. In the middle of the room stood a double easel with the two pictures of the year, and at a little distance a second with a fresh canvas, on which a subject was just sketched in. For Mr. Morland never allowed himself to "rust," as he said, for a single day, and as soon as the last touch was given to the Academy pictures he began afresh, though he never hurried himself, nor, as he often said, "laid on the paint thick to save time." The two show pictures were—(1.) "The First Violet." A portrait of a lady idealized; a girl in faded green, leaning against the stem of a birch tree bursting into spring foliage, apparently looking at a violet root with its freshly-blown flower between the broad leaves, but evidently dreaming a sweet day-dream about the half open letter she held in her hand. In the slight, lithe, exquisitely-poised figure, the heavy mass of wavy, dead chestnut hair unspoilt by dyes or frizzle, the strange, weird, mocking smile and eyes, it was manifest that Car Chetwynd had been the painter's ideal. (2.) "The Last Rose." Two people standing in a quaint, old-fashioned garden beside a sundial. One a middle-aged man, with hair and beard much tinged with grey,

offering the last-plucked autumn rose to a middle-aged woman, in a wonderful dead-leaf samite gown, whose still fair face was full of life-struggles, but struggles that also showed evidence of victory. She was looking up at the grave, noble face bending towards her with genuine surprise, but a surprise in which joy was dawning to brightness. The autumn sunset, the drifting crimson leaves, and the mist rising from the pool beyond, imaged the decline of ardent hopes and impetuous joys; but there was that in both faces which told that that noble man had ground for hope that his rose would be accepted with a feeling of trusting repose in his love, and that presently a sunset gleam would illumine those two evening lives, as it was about to burst forth in the sky. It was a picture full of meaning, painted in Mr. Morland's best manner, and it had been said at the private interview by a well-known art-judge, that on this picture would rest his fame.

He glanced at it now himself, with a loving, lingering look, as he carefully removed a morsel of fluff from one corner, and throwing himself down in his writing chair, he said, "Read that letter, my dear; I want to know what you think of it. To me it is the hardest thrust Leopold has ever given me, and they have been not a few."

Anne laid her hand caressingly on her father's shoulder as she took the letter, and murmuring, "Poor dearest father! you deserve to have children

who give you nothing but pleasure," she sat down and opened and read the letter.

"MY VERY DEAR FATHER,

"I much fear you have been uneasy about our fate, but pray do not worry, for there is no need. We have both intended writing, and I suppose have fallen into a kind of seesaw, both intending and both putting off, and ending by doing nothing. I have certainly had some excuse of not knowing what to say. Happily, or unhappily, as you may take it, I have become deeply attached to a Provençal girl, the only child of a proprietor of some wealth in this neighbourhood. She is very young and exceedingly beautiful; able to be led up to any amount of cultivation and 'culture'—not always the same things—and possessing a character and natural qualities which are as nearly perfect as anything I can imagine in the shape of woman. I saw her first by accident, at one of the festivals of this strange country—a *musalade*, or calf-weaning among the great droves of fierce cattle, which would carry you back to the days of Homer. I took her face as my model for the Jeanne d'Arc, and I think when you see the picture you will say I have never yet done anything so good. I have felt as if this affection, as an object, had stirred me up to more exertion than I could ever have believed in otherwise. I think there is more power of work in me than I have been able hitherto to see. Life with Noël (her name is Noël Privas)

would go far to realize my best ideas, and if an artist is to make out any real work he ought to live some kind of chosen ideal life.

"Of course I know that my marrying at once is out of the question; but if you are kind enough to consent, I should like to bind myself to my little girl for next year, or at most to marry her in two years' time. If it cannot be made possible for us to live in London, I would stay somewhere in the south, and send home my pictures until I had stored enough honey to feed the hive. I should be very glad to have your answer as soon as possible, for of course I ought to tell her something immediately. My picture will go off almost directly by 'grande vitesse,' but I cannot leave Noël in a total uncertainty as to the future.

"With best of loves to Anne and the girls and boys, of course specially including Car,

"Your affectionate son,

"LEOPOLD MORLAND.

"P.S.—I am sure Anne would love my little Noël."

Enclosed was a note, in a small separate cover, from Nasmyth.

"DEAR MORLAND,

"Leo has certainly fairly tumbled in love with this very pretty and very good little girl. Of course she is a Catholic, and a very simple and good one, and

of course it is a kettle of fish. I wish we had never come into the neighbourhood at all ; but there's no use in crying over spilt milk. Privas père is furious—1st, Because he wants the girl to marry another man ; 2nd, Because Leo is a Protestant, or, as he puts it, ‘not a Christian.’ I fancy the child will be wealthy according to the notions of the country, which is the queerest and most inconceivable of any place on earth, out of a fairy-tale. And the girl is like a fairy, too, only a thorough good one. Leo is more stirred up than I ever knew him. I hope you will do what you can. I am altogether sorry about it, but the girl is so good and sweet, that things might after all have been much worse.

“With kindest regards, especially to Miss Morland,
“Yours faithfully,

“HARRY NASMYTH.”

Anne read this note with great attention, and with a slight consciousness at this second “especially” devoted to herself, put it back into the larger envelope, and returned it to her father saying, “Poor Leo ! He certainly does not manage to sail in calm waters, and one never knows with him what is going to turn up next. Perhaps, dear father, it would really save you a great deal of anxiety if he were once married.”

“If he were married, yes, in a possible way,” replied Morland, with irritation. “If he married properly—a

woman able to keep herself, a woman whom we knew, and who would be a sister to you all, and one I should like Janet and Lettice to go out with, I should feel it a great burthen off my shoulders. Leo wants to be under good petticoat government, for he is one of those women-men who will never be ruled by any other. But to go and fall in love with a mere child.—a pretty face, a Roman Catholic, a Provençal creature with lava and knives in her blood! Deuce take it all! it really passes all one's patience to bear. And even Nasmyth, dear old fellow! seems bewitched by this French cat-a-mountain, and sees her with Leo's eyes!"

"I doubt that," said Anne, with a pretty pink tinge in her cheeks. "I think Harry's note is a sensible one, and looks as if he had really made a sound judgment on the matter."

"I dare say you do, Queen Anne!" replied her father mischievously. "But not joking, you are right about Nasmyth. He is as steady as old time, and when he engages himself it will be to some sensible right-minded woman of his own class and position, and not a blackavised Bohemian fortune-teller!"

"Oh! dear father, please don't call the poor girl by such dreadful names! I am sure she is nice and good, as well as pretty. The only thing is, what is to be done? Could you—I suppose you would not like——"

"Well, out with it. Like what?"

"Like to let them come and live here, I was going

to say," said Anne, colouring timidly. "I could make her happy, I think ; they could take my room, and you should never be inconvenienced, father."

" You are the best daughter and the best woman, except one, that ever lived, Anne ! your mother's very own unselfish child. But, my dear, you have quite enough on your hands as it is ; and then, I think—I think it would not do to bring Leo's wife here as long as Car is with us."

Mr. Morland hesitated considerably before resolving thus to declare his mind.

" Car !" exclaimed Anne, a light breaking in. " Do you mean——"

" I mean that I have thought that she likes Leo, and, my dear, I must say I wish it could have been so."

" Do you really wish that, father ? I certainly do not !" replied Anne, speaking much more decidedly, especially when giving an unfavourable opinion, than she usually did.

" Indeed !" said Morland, surprised, as blind men are when they find that clear-sighted women have penetrated the depths of character which to them are completely veiled by velvet gloves and a pretty face. " I never knew that you had had any difficulty with your cousin."

" I never would allow any difficulty to be made," replied Anne, in her true womanly dignity of goodness, " but she has tried to make many a one, father, and

would, if she could, step in continually between you and me."

"Well, you do astonish me! And yet—now I think of it—there have been times—only I never like to judge any one, and she seems to me a mere simple beautiful child."

"You are too good, father, and I am too bad," replied Anne, smiling at him, "but you must remember that all girls are not the same to men and to other women. Some of us are very like cats; velvet paws, and claws under the velvet, and the sensation of the two conveys a very different impression. But I should never have said any of this to you if you had not spoken first. Car owes you everything, you know, father dear, and your chivalrous nature would be slow to see any faults at all in a woman you have sheltered and loved. I should like Car to marry very much, but I should be very, very sorry if she were Leo's wife."

"I am very sorry to hear all this," said Morland, after a pause. "She will have a very pretty little fortune, too, and that is not to be despised nowadays, when life is so much more burthensome than formerly. Well, well! Anyhow, I cannot give my written consent offhand to Leo's marrying this girl," he said, with a sharpness to which what had been said of his favourite niece added an edge of flavour. "*That* is quite impossible. He must make no engagements or promises, and you must write to him, Anne,

very strongly on that point. I will put in a short note as clearly as possible conveying the same thing. But you must write very fully and at length, which I have no time to do—and kindly, though very decidedly. You see he does not say there is any positive engagement entered on, does he?"

"No," said Anne hesitatingly. "He does not say it in the letter, but I should think he has spoken positively to her, because you see Harry says the father is angry."

"A very good thing too! I admire his wisdom. He wants the girl to marry a man of his own class and choosing, whose ideas will suit his own. You go and write to Leo all I say—that he will never be happy with an incongruous wife, and she, in the end, will never be happy with him. What would Joan of Arc herself do in her armour, in a London drawing-room? And this little thing, in her petticoat and bodice, will feel just as unsuited. It is very easy for Leo to fall in love, but love wants something more than rosebuds to live on in this country. I tell you plainly, Anne, that I can do no more than find professions for Paul and Caryl, and Leo has already more than his full share. I have no idea of leaving my daughters to eat their hearts out in London lodgings, and you girls shall all be made comfortable—in moderation—when I am gone. Leo can make his own way perfectly well, and I will not give him a hope of dangling about here with us, with a wife and babies to be in every one's way. Write

your letter carefully, my dear, and tell him to say to Miss Noël clearly, that I can give no consent whatever till I have seen him and heard what he has to say. Then come and show me your letter, and I will put my word in. Write kindly, mind, but put it strongly and clearly. And, Anne——”

“Yes, dear father.”

“I suppose you would like to be ‘especially’ remembered to Nasmyth ?”

“I shall send my kind regards without the especially,” replied Anne, turning to go away. “And I think I will say so myself, father, in Leo’s letter.”

“Very well, dearie, do as you like; you will never do wrong. And, Anne—see about some ice, will you ?”

CHAPTER XI.

THE FALSE ISOLTE.

HAVING temporarily shifted the weight of his anxieties to the shoulders of his prime minister, the painter had got himself well at work with his new canvas, sketching in with masterly skill the farewell of Lancelot and Elaine, with the shield in her hand, when a low tap was heard at the door, which opened immediately afterwards, and Car Chetwynd advanced her wonderful head, saying, “ May I come in, uncle, for a minute ? ”

There was a trifle less than usual of hearty response in Morland’s reply—“ Yes, my dear, of course,” which slight atmospheric change Car instantly read, and laid with unerring sagacity to its true cause.

“ I am going out with Caryl, uncle, and we want to take Juan. May we go to the Kensington Gardens ? ”

“ You two alone ? Can’t Paul go ? ”

“ Yes, uncle, if you like. But at this time of day I should think Caryl’s sublime protection would be enough.”

“ Take Paul too. What are you going for, besides

the walk?" Morland would not have asked this of his own girls, but he always had some dim perception that Car had purposes in her walks.

"I feel restless, uncle; I cannot settle to anything."

"What is it, my dear? Is anything the matter?"

"Yes, uncle. Never mind—no, I can't tell you!"

"It will settle itself, I dare say." And Car sat down on the "throne" steps, just where she knew that a slanting sheaf of sunbeams would fall on her hair and turn its glorious coils to red gold. Her uncle had an absolute passion for colour, and as he looked at her slight, but exquisite figure, like a wood-nymph or naiad, whose every movement showed some new grace—her dress, long and flowing, always trimmed in some quiet, perfect way with old lace and quaintly-shaped clasps, her face leaning on one hand, her heavy fringed lids showing the liquid light below them, and her pale cheeks with the traces on them of tears—he could not help feeling tenderly drawn towards her, and bitterly angry with Leo for missing the wife whom he had always desired for his son.

"My little one!" he said with almost his son's sweetness of voice. "Cheer up, Car! I think I know what has unsettled you—that abominable French letter, eh?"

Car's head bent a little lower as she murmured some inarticulate words, and allowed two large tears to flow slowly just on to her cheeks.

"My dear child, it is really enough to make a man swear to see such folly!—but I say again, Car, cheer up!"

Many a man has made a fool of himself for a while, and come out of it harmless. I dare say this girl's people——”

“Then there is a girl?” asked Car, in the lowest of her sweet tones. “I knew there was, but Anne would not tell me a word. She is not kind to me, I think.”

“Oh, well, well! Nonsense, my dear! Anne saw Leo's letter in confidence, you know, but there is no harm in your knowing also in confidence that he wants to marry a girl out there; at least he thinks he does; but a man is so easily led on, and I feel sure he has fallen into a trap. An artful, sly puss of a French girl, you know, and some more artful old father, who thinks Leo and Nasmyth a couple of English milords with princely fortunes. That's about what it all is, I fancy. I have made Anne write to Leo to tell him I refuse my consent till he comes home, and that the sooner he comes the better.”

“Poor girl!” said Car, with the prettiest air of pity. “But perhaps he is really attached to her, uncle, and it would be a pity to spoil such a complete romance. Is she a Provençal nobleman's daughter—some grand Seigneur with a château, whose ancestors lived at good King René's court?”

“Grand Seigneur indeed! No, that would be just bearable. Her father is a farmer, and I shouldn't be surprised if she washes at some spring with bare feet, as I remember the girls doing in the south of France.

Both he and Nasmyth seem to think her so beautiful, that she must have bewitched them both with her forward tricks. Deuce take all those French women! They would wile a fish out of the water."

"Poor Leo! poor fellow! Now, uncle, you really must not be hard upon him! I dare say he has a good story to tell when he comes, and you must hear it all out patiently, and be a good father, and come forward to the front with, 'Bless you, my children!' Come, Ju, old man, we are going out!"

Car, having now extracted from her indulgent uncle what she wanted to know, was trying to coax Juan away, but the faithful dog would not stir till Morland said, "Hie, Ju! get your stick!" when he jumped down from his chair with a short bark of joy, rushed to a rack at the end of the room and fetched thence his own particular short stick, and wagging his tail as fast as it could move, announced that he was dressed and ready to go to the world's end. Car laid a soft little kiss on her uncle's forehead, and vanished out of the room. As soon as she was outside the door, she bit her lip and stamped her little foot fiercely on the ground, saying to herself, "Oh, I do wish he were here now! I'll find some way of punishing him well!"

CHAPTER XII.

“FAREWELL, SWEET HEART!”

“No letter to-day, old fellow. We had better be jogging to Les Stes. Maries, I think. A letter can be forwarded there, you know, in a day.”

“I really don’t know what to do about going to Les Stes. Maries. Of course we must move on, but I can settle to nothing. Anyhow, I must finish packing my picture, for of course we must leave Cabridelle. Whether we turn northward or not, the picture-box must be taken to St. Chamas and go by passenger-train. So good-bye, Jeanne d’Arc! I hope your head will be quite turned by the praises you get in London before I see you again.”

The canvas and stretchers were carefully laid and fixed in the box which had been ordered for them, and the lid nailed down—for in the midst of heart pains and love’s bitterest distress business must still be done—and one of the farm men, well-paid, was soon carrying it in a little *taps* towards St. Chamas, which was looked upon as quite a capital by the whole

neighbourhood. This same man before he started told Leopold how the whole country was looking forward to the *ferrade*, or cattle-branding, to be held during the next few days, and gave such a glowing description of it, that Morland seized upon the idea as some relief to his weariness and the bitter pain of his own and Noël's unhappiness. For all Nasmyth's efforts with Privas, and all Noël's beseeching prayers to her grandmother, had not been followed by the least success. Paquette, indeed, had not behaved unkindly to the girl whom, after her own fierce way, she most tenderly loved. But she had entirely scouted the idea of Noël's marrying a Protestant, or leaving them all to be carried beyond the seas to unknown lands, where the people, by all credible accounts, never worshipped God at all ; and she rated Noël so soundly for her impiety in loving Leo, or allowing herself to have anything to say to a man who was not a “Christian,” that the poor girl had fallen into depths of discouragement and sorrow, thinking that she had perhaps really been bewitched and fallen under the power of the evil one to the danger of losing her soul. She had, therefore, readily agreed to her grandmother's proposal of going for some days to the Benedictine Convent at Aigues Mortes, where her mother's sister was Superior, that she might prepare herself to make a good confession, and in silent solitude learn what was marked out for her to do. There she could see Père Maurel in more peace than during his hurried visits to the neighbouring

stations or to see the sick ; and once away from Leopold, her mind would more clearly weigh and decide what course to follow. She should send and offer a silver heart, too, at the shrine of the Three Marys, in the full trust that they who had anointed the Body of Christ, and watched for Him at the sepulchre, would obtain for her some great favour and benefit.

Paquette was very anxious to get the girl away, for she felt sure that Morland and his friend would hang about Cabridelle, and she much dreaded lest Leopold's power of persuasion and the weakness wrought by such love as Noël's might lead the girl to go off with him under the idea of getting married in the first church they came to. For Paquette was very ignorant of the details of life, and had the smallest possible idea of what was passing in the world around her. She therefore bade Noël put up all her worldly wealth of extra clothing, *i.e.* her one extra gown and skirt, both embroidered, for Sundays and feasts, with her few changes of under-garments, spare shoes, and best shawl and apron. When these were laid neatly in the little wicker-case covered with coarse brown canvas with brass nails, Noël had only to ask her father's forgiveness and blessing to be ready to start.

One item, however, had been omitted in Paquette's programme. She had intended to drive away with Noël in the small cart with the splendid bay mule appropriated for that service, without seeing either of the guests at Cabridelle. But love was too

keen for such simple craft, and Noël went straight to the stable, whither she had seen Leopold go out about his box, and made known to him she was going away. Then saying in a low voice, “Come to the well in the orchard and say good-bye, for in half an hour we shall start,” she vanished with quick steps.

Morland hastily dispatched his own business with the labourer who had been giving him the account of the *ferrade*, and then strode with long steps to the little well in the orchard, where he had so often watched Noël drawing water, washing her cheese-splints and pans, and filling the great two-handled, antique-shaped jars with water for the house. How many a sweet snatch of song and old versified Provençal proverb and word of wisdom he had heard there from her lips; how many a word of petting and coaxing thanks he had given his “Birdie” in return, as he lay in the shade under the orange trees; and how richly she had repaid him with the shell colour that had softly risen to her clear cheeks, with the deep look in her glorious eyes, with the slight toss of her pretty head with all its lustrous plaits. Such moments as those he had felt to be the very choicest and richest of his life, worth whole after years of loss and pain, even to have been enjoyed for an hour.

Yes; but such moments in life are apt to mark its meridian, especially if they are indulged in without the foundation of any principle in their beginning or aim.

Perhaps even Leopold's light, superficial, impressionable nature felt this as deeply as he was capable of feeling anything, when he had brushed through the wild flowers of the orchard, and once more saw Noël beside the well, with the oranges hanging over her head, and the deepest sadness in her lovely face, as she leant upon the sundial with her rounded cheek in her hand. Then indeed her look and the droop of her whole figure went to Morland's heart. He had gone close up to her and taken her hand, before either of them uttered a word.

"My own one, my red rose of delight!" murmured Leo at last, in his softest tones. "You are going to the convent, then, to-day?"

"Yes, Leo, to-day." It was the first time she had ever given him his name, and he felt it all through him, as her sweet low voice spoke the word. "I wished it myself, for it is all misery here. My father will not speak to me, even at meals, and everything is wrong. He frightens me."

"My sweetest darling! I cannot imagine how he can be such a brute to you. But I beg your pardon, for he is your father still. I am glad, too, that you are going, sweet, for we, of course, are leaving Cabridelle. We intend being present first at the *ferrade*, and then, if all turns out well, we shall go on to Les Stes. Maries, and witness the feast there, and then make our way to Aigues Mortes. Who knows but that I may see you there, in your

convent? My *muscadet* will be glad to see me, will she not?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" exclaimed Noël, in a transport of delight. "Ah, now I shall not be so sad, for I shall think of seeing you again! And who knows, Leo mine, but that the Saints may bring us together after the feast! that you will get a good letter from England, and that we shall be able to be married after all? You will tell me whatever news you get, will you not, dearest?"

"Of course I shall tell you, sweetest one, and you must also tell me where you are to be found? Is there only one convent, and what is it called?"

"There is but one. It is the Benedictine Convent, which was part of the famous Abbey of Psalmodie ages ago, and after the revolution the nuns went back to it. It is near the church, and any one will show it you. You must ask for Mère Baugé, the Abbess, and beg her to give you leave to see me. They always call me Mademoiselle Privas when I am there."

"And you are Mademoiselle Privas, are you not? It is a pretty name for my darling," said Leo, caressing her beautiful head. "But don't let them turn you into a nun, Birdie, for I cannot have my singing-bird caged up with those cross old nuns. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear; but the nuns are none of them cross," replied Noël, smiling a little. "They are as sweet, and even, and delicious as ripe peaches, and so kind to me.

And they are so good, oh! so good, and they chant softly and beautifully in the choir, like angels. I love so much to hear them sing *Tenebrae*, in the Holy week. Then it really is like angels very far off, and very sorrowful, sitting under the cross, when our Lord died. I shall never be good enough to be a nun."

"I am glad of it, for then you would be a great deal too good for me. Remember that, and remember your troth, my own one, and remember me. There is your grandmother calling you. Good-bye, my own best darling, and may God keep you!"

He pressed her passionately to him, kissing her again and again, as if his heart were in each kiss, and then Noël tore herself away and fled like a lapwing to the house, where her grandmother was standing beside the little cart, giving some last directions to one of the men about the cows. Noël got into the cart, and took her place beside her grandmother without a word, and Paquette giving Brunon a touch of the whip, the powerful mule sprang forward with his ears laid back, and cantered viciously across the plain.

Noël looked back with longing eyes at the farm and tufted orchard, and saw from the window of the room which the two Englishmen had so long inhabited, a handkerchief waving in sign of farewell. She leant back behind her grandmother, and kissed and waved her hand. Again the handkerchief fluttered, and then Cabridelle was left far behind. Noël

felt that, whatever was before her, whether unknown sorrows or some new joy, that the sweetest chapter of her opening life was closed and folded away altogether into the past.

CHAPTER XIII.

AIGUES MORTES.

I SHALL not follow the course of Paquette and her granddaughter in their somewhat broken and complicated journey across the Camargue; first leaving the little cart and Brunon after a good day's work, at a friendly *mas*, then being taken across the Petit Rhone and great Canal de Beaucaire by other friends with whom Privas had acquaintance, and finally making their way through the network of salt marshes and lagoons, by the old raised causeway across which is thrown the picturesque old gateway and tower called La Carbonnière, into Aigues Mortes. We must take a quicker flight and get into the curious old city before them.

Every one, or nearly every one, in these days, has at least felt a passing interest in going through Avignon, even while treating that most beautiful and suggestive city merely as a railway station. Studied by the eye alone, Avignon carries back the gazer to some vision of the bygone centres of feudalism and

days of mediæval strongholds; and the mind conjures up with ease long processions of armed knights and warriors, and something of the ceremonial of feudal chivalry. The city of Aigues Mortes even more completely fulfils the same end, for its picturesque walls, towers, and fortifications have not been altered by a stone since the 13th century, when they rose under the Genoese Boccamegra for Philip the Bold, the son of the great St. Louis. A very remarkable round tower, ninety feet high, surmounted again by a turret thirty-four feet, which was formerly the citadel, instantly attracts the eye. It is known as the Tour de Constance, to commemorate the persistence of Philip the Bold in carrying out his father's plans of fortification. St. Louis sailed out from Aigues Mortes,—now three good miles from the sea—on his crusade in A. D. 1270, when a fleet of 800 vessels and an army of 40,000 men gave a far different aspect to this now truly buried city. On his return, the great French king fortified the town with the idea of making it a stronghold against the Saracens, whose ravages and obstinate occupation of Languedoc, Provence, and the Riviera generally, have left so many memorials in the mountain towns and fortresses, as well as in the superstitions, habits, customs, and language of the northern shores of the Mediterranean. Aigues Mortes had been a well-known town long before the days of St. Louis; for its origin dates from the 8th century, and in the 11th it had clustered round a magnificent

abbey, whose ruins are still to be seen. This abbey, very famous in its day for the multitude of its monks, and the office which never ceased its chant day or night, was called "Psalmodie," under which name its renown was spread far and wide. As the kings of France in the 13th century were only suzerains of the southern provinces, they possessed no ports of their own on the Mediterranean, and St. Louis therefore bought the abbey with its dependencies, as it stood, of the Abbot Raymond ; and for the protection of the merchants and artisans who flocked to any considerable crusading station, as well as for the safety of the crusaders themselves, the king began to erect that great citadel known as the Tour de Constance, surrounded the town walls with a vast fosse, and spanned the approach by the long raised causeway with the strong fortified gate of La Carbonnière. On his first safe return from the Holy Land, St. Louis took immense pains to render Aigues Mortes both a strong fortress and a safe resort ; and in the total lack of stone and good building materials, he stripped the old city of Maguelonne * of all its curious tombs. This was afterwards looked upon by the inhabitants, whose reverence for the dead is a beautiful and deep-rooted characteristic, as a sacrilege which was visited by the king's subsequent defeat and death.

The fortifications of Aigues Mortes were built upon the model of those at Damietta, in Egypt ; and are to

* The parent of Montpellier.

be seen exactly as when built in all their glory of loopholed battlements and picturesque towers and turrets at this day. It is true that the great fosse has been filled up, as it became a mere bed of fever, and that the canal leading to the old harbour of Grace du Roi, and the ruined port with its old mooring-rings—to which it is traditionally said that the galley of St. Louis had been fastened—are now choked up with sand and marsh slime, and overgrown with reeds and lagoon vegetation, and that the armies and galleys of crusading hosts, with the interests and faith which animated them, are all among the things for ever past. But, nevertheless, the old city of Aigues Mortes, with its lofty citadel and abiding walls, still stands above the marshy plains of Languedoc, as if to witness that the place where unceasing praise had once gone up from the devout choirs of Psalmodie could not be swept away.

All around it, as about Rome, the green marshes and salt plains have become deadly with pestilence, and the whole aspect of the country, even more than the Camargue,* by degrees has come to wear the garb of living death. At this present time it suggests nothing but Dante's infernal circles; and as the black boats and their sallow, hollow-eyed boatmen float slowly down the stagnant canals, laden with salt, or half-decayed, fœtid reeds, or refuse coal, or fish and nets, the

* Aigues Mortes, though looked upon as the capital of the Camargue, is beyond the limits of the island.

spectator feels as if gazing at the waters of the Cocytus, the Phlegethon, or the Styx ; to be watching the transit of Charon and the condemned, and to be altogether removed from all living interests and men, into a world of phantoms and shadows.

As long ago as the 13th century, a kind of foreboding chill seemed to strike the inhabitants of this singular town as to their ill-omened name ; and they besought St. Louis again and again to change it to “*Bonne par Force.*” But the old title, for some unexplained reason, obstinately clung to them, and the lapse of time brought with it its exact adaptation to the city. Within the walls it presents a curious resemblance to a chess-board, being laid out, on the old Assyrian model, in straight lines and squares, with a larger and rather more sunny and cheerful square in the centre. The interior of the citadel de Constance is less pleasing to the imagination than the outside view. It was made for many centuries a state prison, and, like the prisons of the Roman persecutions, was divided into two great round chambers the size of the tower, of which the lower was deprived of all light and air but that derived from the aperture in the upper floor. The women taken prisoners during the miserable religious wars of Languedoc and the Cevennes—the Calvinists, and, afterwards, the Huguenots who refused to abjure their religion after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes—were thrown into these frightful dungeons ; and, what is almost impossible to the mind now to

conceive, but is absolutely a fact of history, the last victims were released only in A.D. 1767. This act of humanity was undertaken on the sole responsibility of the governor of Languedoc, M. de Beauveau, whose name deserves to be handed down to all generations with perpetual honour.

Through the narrow, paved streets, with the tall, quaint-roofed and quaint-dormered houses, as silent as if they formed part of a city of the dead, Paquette and Noël were now making their way in a little charette drawn by an aged *aigre*, which they had hired at a *douane*, or custom-house for the preservation of salt, after crossing the Canal de Beaucaire. Both the women looked travel-worn and weary with the stagnant heat of the marshes, and Noël's pretty head drooped from more causes than fatigue. But they had not far to go now, and, turning down a street at the left angle of the chief *place*, the charette stopped before a high-arched door, in a lofty, grey, blind wall. Paquette directed Noël to get out and pull the old brown handle of the bellwire twice, after which a deep, hollow bell rang with a sound as time-worn as if it had hung there when St. Louis passed through the town. Next, the rusted wicket cautiously slid back, and a veiled head was seen behind it for a moment, after which the ponderous gate creaked and groaned as it rolled back its great leaves to allow the charette and its occupants to drive inside. They stopped in front of the *portière*, where a nun in a

long black habit with white wimple and head under-gear was standing, and the next moment Noël was receiving the usual convent salute of a kiss on both cheeks. Paquette, who was slower in descending and arranging her reins, was then greeted in the same way ; and the nun, whom they called Sister Romana, bade them welcome very kindly, and pulled a second brown handle, which in due time brought out another nun, rather stately, who said that Mother Abbess would soon be at leisure to see them. Just now she was with the *économme* (bursar), and could not be disturbed, but she would just take them into the church for a little prayer, and then they should rest themselves in the parlour till she came or sent for them. Noël was not even allowed to carry her little brown valise, but it was deposited in the *portière* for Sister Romana to take into the convent when the hour came for her to be relieved.

They went across the broad, silent, moss-grown court, paved with immense grey stones, which looked as if they also had been part of the spoils of Maguelonne ; and Noël glanced up at the steep flagged roof with its exquisite 13th century cresting, its tourelles crowned with quaint, old *girandoles* or weather flags of lacelike ironwork, that long ages ago had been gilt, and its stacks of magnificent chimneys set together cornerwise, and each one inscribed with

Dier. Pour. Moy. Qui. Contre.

the motto of the last Abbot of Psalmodie, whose

sister had founded the Abbey for women, which the present Benedictine branch had superseded in the year A.D. 1523. Upon the roof, and fluttering down to the court, a number of white pigeons sprinkled, tame enough to perch on the nuns' shoulders and eat out of their hands. Their soft, intermittent cooing was the only sound to be heard through the great building, that, like the rest of the town, looked like some landmark left stranded by a by-gone age on the shores of time.

The nun made her way to an arched and fretted doorway, closed only by an ancient leather hanging-mat, which she lifted up to allow Paquette and Noël to pass in, and let fall noiselessly again. They found themselves in the old convent church, frequented also by such of the neighbourhood as wished to hear mass there, or use it for their private devotions. Narrow windows of dim, but exquisite old glass, broken up with a good deal of white, allowed a coloured light to fall in checkered stains on the pavement; and as the three women knelt on the timeworn stones, the stained light seemed to fall on three shadows from another world. The altar was of old marble mosaic, and above it and the tabernacle was an ancient "doom" in fresco, whose faded figures, to Noël's eyes, wore a solemn and majestic appearance, though, in truth, they were poor as works of art. Paquette knelt a short time, repeating half aloud part of a short chaplet or rosary, and then sat down nearly

asleep; but Noël knelt long, with her head bent, on the low vesper chair. Here, at least, there was a rest from the fevered thoughts and feelings of the past five weeks; here it seemed as if she had been transported to another world, very still, and calm, and colourless, where, if any light from above should be granted her, it would strike into her mind peacefully and without disturbance. Like many people who live in the country, surrounded only with natural images and pursuits, without much of the daily outward ministrations of religion, Noël had been overcome and weakened by the force of the mere natural and material world, which feeds and ministers to passion and the natural feelings and wishes. Surrounded by the beauty of fruits and flowers, harvests and vintages, animals and their young, and all the habits, and sights, and sounds, and wants of natural life, she, too, had felt her blood quicken and flow in a swifter course, and had gradually come to feel that what was the habit of all nature was the habit also of man, as nature's lord. Love as a natural emotion and need, rather than love as a pure affection coming from God and tending to Him and to the burning up of all selfish desires, had asserted itself in her life with a tyranny which had bound her heart and mind with strong chains; and of late she had felt these chains to be bonds, which were eating into her very soul. Still pure and innocent, because from childhood her purity had been taught and her innocence had been guarded,

and because thrice a day she threw her heart into the *Angelus* and besought, with real childlike love, the "Mother of the Spotless One" to be her mother for life and death, Noël's passions had yet been stirred up and heated by the thoughtless, caressing admiration of her English lover, and many of the finer safeguards had been broken through as threads are snapt before a fierce fire. She had lost the one great principle of allowing nothing whatever to banish the thought of God, and she had cherished a shy reluctance to asking advice and opening her needs to her confessor. But now, as she knelt in the dim old church, severed from outward disturbance, and in front of the tabernacle, where her faith discerned God's Presence, her soul seemed to awaken, fibre by fibre, and like the undertones of the bursting leafage of spring, to put forth and unfold its whisperings of wonted life, and for the first time for many weeks Noël really prayed.

She was still kneeling with her hands covering her face, while Paquette was enjoying a sound and refreshing nap, when the heavy hanging-mat was again lifted, and the nun who had brought them into the church noiselessly crossed the pavement and touched Noël on the shoulder. She started a little, wakened up her grandmother, and the three women left the church. The nun quietly said, "Mother Abbess will see you now. I am going to take you to her room."

And then returning to her shadow-state, she noiselessly led them down a long, wide corridor, and lifting her finger at the end of it, tapped softly twice at a door covered with a thick green curtain. “*Deo gratias*” was heard in a distinct, rather deep voice, and the nun opened the door, motioned to Noël and her grandmother to enter, and closed it behind them without a sound.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ABBESS AND THE CONFESSOR.

"You are welcome," said the same distinct deep voice as they went in. "Madame Paquette, you have done well to bring me your little child. And you, my little one, have done rightly to come. You shall enjoy a real rest for a while, which, please God, will do you good. But you must be hungry and thirsty, and tired, with your long, hot journey, and our great Father, St. Benedict, orders that all strangers and travellers shall be first taken to the church, to thank God for their safety, and then to the refectory, to be refreshed. But as our time may be cut short, I will ask you, Madame Paquette, to stay and talk to me now for a short time, and then your dinner will be quite ready for you. Noël, my child, will you step out into the garden through this anteroom, and remain there till you are called?"

Noël bent her head as she replied, "Yes, ma Mère," and went her way through the little room and the

large casement window like a glass door down to the ground to which the Abbess had pointed.

It was a fine though marked face which smiled slightly at her as she left the room, and then turned all its power of attention upon Paquette, who sat down with folded arms in the chair placed for her. Mère Baugé, the Benedictine Abbess, as she was called, though she was in fact only a Prioress, was Noël's mother's sister, and must have had much the same cast of face as Noël herself when she was young. Even now, when like all southern women she looked much older than her age, her face had a dignified beauty in which force and sweetness were well mingled. Her ample wide-sleeved Benedictine habit suited her face, and, under the tight head-band and sepulchral linen folds, the excellent dark eyes gave the impression of administrative power and motherly responsibility, as well as truth and integrity.

"I am glad you have come, my dear Aunt Paquette," she said again. "You have acted with judgment and true kindness to your poor little grandchild. I gathered from your letter that the young man in question is a real gentleman by birth and education, though he paints as a profession, and thereupon I take for granted that his intentions towards Noël are good. Is not that so?"

"I have no sort of reason, ma Mère, to think otherwise," replied Paquette. "I have no fault to find with the gentleman himself, though I wish it was his friend,

whose steadiness and certain character I think a deal of. Mr. Morland is a real gentleman, no doubt, and acts like one, though I fancy he has been a good bit wild. But then, you see, he is a Protestant, ma Mère, to begin with, and I cannot think how the child could ever bring herself to think of a husband who is not a Christian. Next, her father is quite bent on her marrying the cattle-guard, who has lately come back to our side, and Rambert is so famous on all the *terracées* as a brawler of the fiercest *palusins*; indeed, as both muzzler and brawler, one whom the beasts can never conquer."

"Rambert the cattle-guard? But is he a good man, Aunt Paquette? I have heard him spoken of as a wonder for courage and strength, but I should think not a man living up to his religion, and a rough mate for that poor bird."

"He does not practise his religion, that is true, ma Mère. Rambert has not crossed the door-step of a church nor bent the knee to a priest for years. But still he is good at heart, and I do not think it is any vice that keeps him from practising his religious duties. Men are strange creatures, ma Mère. They are so proud and shy about doing what costs a woman nothing at all, and, indeed, what she feels to be a comfort. And then, I have heard that Rambert was never much instructed—quite in the old-fashioned way, you know; and maybe the old Curé of St. Chamas was a little rough and quick with boys.

Anyhow, Rambert never seemed to have any pleasure in his religion, or to put any heart in it at all, but he told me lately that if Noël were his wife she could lead him with a string and make of him what she chose. Why cannot it be so? Why must a mere girl's fancy come between us and all our happiness in the child?"

A sad, sympathizing smile gleamed across the Abbess' discerning face. "A girl's fancy has more than once disturbed the world, dear Aunt Paquette. I suppose God, who instituted marriage in Paradise, also made women what they are in regard to their hearts and affections. You surely do not think any one can be *bidden* to love?"

Paquette stared, open-eyed, at the Abbess.

"Well, ma Mère, I can't exactly say; but a girl may surely be bidden to marry by her parents?"

"She may, and the marriage may turn out be a very unhappy one; nay, it may even become a very sinful one, in consequence. Is it not so?"

"God forefend our little one should so disgrace her religion and us!" uttered Paquette, making the sign of the cross. "You are right, ma Mère, of course; but you cannot conceive what a great annoyance it is to her father and me."

"Is Nicole very much displeased?" asked the Abbess.

"Furiously displeased, ma Mère. I never saw him so evil-disposed. He makes me wretched with his

loud, angry voice and cruel threats about the child, and she makes me miserable with her swollen eyelids and sad face. Poor innocent lamb! Ah, I do wish there were no men at all in the world! We should get along so easy and pleasant if there were not! Caspitello! —I ask your pardon—I mean, Dame! how happy we should be then from about Easter till harvest!"

"Poor Aunt Paquette!" said the Abbess, laughing, "you would want just a few for the harvest, would you not? and for the *ferrail*, too, and several other things. No, Paquette: God made men strong, and inventive, and protecting, and therefore they must be cruel and destructive too. You cannot have one set of qualities without their counterparts till we are all safe in Heaven. We should often like to make and sett'e the world over afresh, but it would not be half so good a world as it is made for us, with all its drawbacks. Well, I am very glad you have brought the child here to us. She will have quiet, and the church, and I can see her whenever she likes, and there will be Père Maurel. No other man shall ever disturb her. And I feel sure she wants some little change. She is very pretty—too pretty—I could wish she were not half so beautiful."

"Well, I suppose, as you say about the men, God made her so," said Paquette, with a shrewd kink of the eye. "And for my part, I think a man is always glad to have a pretty wife. Noël is the very likeness of her poor mother, and even rather smaller and less pretty-coloured than my girl was. God rest her dear

soul ! for she was just as much my girl as if she were my own. Too sweet a flower to live long in this world, and I should like to go to her when Noël is only safe married. But I leave it all to you, ma Mère, for I know you love her and wish only her good, and this is a millstone I can't see through, at all!"

A low tap at the door was then heard and answered by the usual "Deo gratias !" and a lay Sister came in to say that the dinner for Madame and Mademoiselle was served in St. Placid's parlour. The Abbess directed the Sister to summon Noël from the garden, and kindly dismissed her with her grandmother, enjoining the Sister to make the travellers eat well and to see that they had everything they wanted.

The next morning Paquette took leave of the kind Abbess, and started alone across part of the Camargue, towards Cabridelle. She was to pick up one of their own neighbouring farmers at some distance from Aigues Mortes, who had promised to see her safe home. And happily, even if she missed him, there was not a creature on the way who would have injured a hair of her head. Noël was up very early to see her start, for Paquette had wished to take advantage of this rare journey to Aigues Mortes to make her confession and communion before she left the town. She had therefore been astir at the earliest streak of dawn, had sought out Père Maurel before his mass, communicating at it, and having thus, in her simple, whole-hearted fashion, "put herself straight," she commended the whole

complication of Noël's affairs to better hands, and started homeward with her heart much lighter than it had been the day before. When the groaning and creaking old gates had shut out the little cart from sight, Noël went slowly back across the court yard into the church.

Should she speak to Père Maurel now, or should she wait a little while till she had argued out the matter with her own mind? She would speak now.

She had seen the grey-haired priest come out of the sacristy in his surplice and purple stole, and knew therefore that he had gone into his confessional. She would seek him there, and without making her regular confession would tell him all her troubles. Perhaps he would be gentler and kinder to her than she now seemed to expect. She knelt for a few moments before the altar, with its quaint old massive lamp and ever-burning red light that gleamed like a live flame, and then stept to the right hand into the outer aisle full of side-chapels—that into which she was going, dedicated to the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin, was hung from floor to roof with ex-votos—and knelt down before the confessional grate. The little door was immediately slid back from within, and the grating unclosed.

"Father," said Noël, without an instant's pause, "I do not wish to confess now, but I should like to tell you several things, if I may."

"Speak, my child ; I am quite ready to hear."

"Father, I have engaged to marry a Protestant."

"My child, I am sorry to hear it. But perhaps you expect that he will become a Catholic ?"

"I have no hope of it; father, but if I marry him he will never interfere with me, nor in any way prevent my practising my religious duties."

"Will he engage that his children shall be brought up Catholics ?"

Noël hesitated. "Father, nothing has been said about that."

"That would be an absolutely necessary condition, my child. Will he engage to be married in a Catholic Church ?"

"Yes, father, he will. He has promised me that."

"That is well, so far, my child. Do your parents give consent to this marriage ?"

"No, father—at least my father refuses his consent, and my grandmother is against it."

"You will obey your father, my child, will you not ?"

"Father, I think not. I do not think I can give up the man I love—the only man I ever shall love—even at my father's wish."

"My child, what is the fourth* commandment ?"

"'Honour thy father and thy mother,' replied Noël, in a very low voice. "Father, I know that; but, surely, the commandment does not mean that we are bound to marry or do not marry as our parents wish."

* According to the Catholic numbering of the Commandments.

"My child, that is caviling and criticising; I think you have been taught that the commandment plainly means obedience *in all that is not sin*. I do not say you would be bound to marry any man your father might point out: but if he should propose any one, you are bound to consider the matter before God, and be able to give good, valid reasons for not accepting his choice. Has he done so?"

"Yes, father. He wishes me to marry Rambert the cattle-guard, on the other side of the Camargue, whose *téradou* is near us."

"Is he a good Christian, my child? Do you know anything about him?"

"I do not love him, father. I do not want to know anything more about him."

"You speak like a child and a woman. Is there not love and love? If you were to marry at your father's choice, should you not love your husband, and try to make him happy?"

"No, father, never!"

My dear little child, what makes you so indocile in this matter? Why not?"

"Because—" said Noël, hesitating, or rather pausing long between each word, "Because if I married—any one—I do not love—I think—I should kill him!"

There was a dead silence—a silence so intense that Noël felt her heart also cease to beat, and as it continued, seeming to her to lengthen out for un-

counted hours, she at last gasped out, “Father ! speak to me ! say something, Father !”

Still there was silence, but at length with a deep sigh, as of some one awakening from unconsciousness, the voice again spoke with far more gentleness even than before. “The words you have just said show what kind of love that is which you are cherishing, and how far it has dragged you aside from the right path. My poor little child ! You have allowed yourself to parley with the evil one, and he has deceived you, as he deceives all women, through your heart. I am glad you have come to me—more glad than I can say, for you have chosen the right means of tearing away the deluding mask of temptation, and of judging according to the truth. We will talk fully over this matter together, my child, and I have no doubt that when it has been unravelled you will find your mind a great deal clearer than it is now. Go first to the altar, and before the Presence of God lay your whole trouble before Him. He alone knows how weary and weighty are the burthens of life, and He alone can loose them from our shoulders by ways unseen to us. Then go to our blessed Mother and put yourself under her care, and ask her to show herself a true mother to you, a poor little motherless one. This afternoon, while the nuns are at office, I shall come to the convent and ask for you, getting leave, of course, of Mother Abbess beforehand. Go now, my little one, for I do not like you to kneel too long. Seek God’s light for

me and for you, but calmly, trustingly ; do not wear yourself out. God bless you, my child !”

The little door instantly closed before the grating, and Noël rose from her knees, already comforted and strengthened, to do as she had been bidden.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FERRADE.

THE sun rose on the great desert of that part of the Camargue lying salt and sandy between Les Stes. Maries and the Petit Rhone. Bounded on the east by the vast irregular marsh-lake of l'Etang des Valcaïres and the other network of swamps and ponds which run up beyond St. Cécile, and on the west by the rushing, impetuous branch river known as the Petit Rhone, the country offered a fine field for the grand ceremony of the *ferrade*, or cattle-branding, to be gone through to-day. The *ferrade* was a much more popular and important festivity than the *muselade*, chiefly on account of the dangerous nature of the combat between the *bioulés*, or powerful young bulls, and the cattle-guards who undertook to brand them with the mark of their owners on the flank. It is, in fact, the Provençal bull-fight, and the struggle in many cases is also one of life and death; for there is no help of machinery or apparatus, such as might easily be contrived for penning in the bullocks, and hobbling

them so as to render them nearly helpless. There is not even the useful assistance of the lasso, by which the South American keepers of the estancias reduce the buffaloes to submission. In the Camargue alone the old hand-to-hand fights of Hercules with the beasts of the field and forest seem still to be maintained, and if it were not that it is a land utterly unvisited and unknown, and dangerous with pestilential marsh-fever, there is no doubt that the Camargue *ferrades* would become the most fashionable resorts for English guardsmen and worn-out tourists in search of some new excitement, to say nothing of authors on the look out for the basis of a magazine article with some pretence of freshness about it. Many a magazine would have "gone up" had the various details of the scene and actors in to-day's *ferrade* been faithfully rendered into "copy" for the benefit of London editors.

What a scene it was! It is impossible to describe it, yet a faint description must be ventured. Far away as the eye could reach northwards lay the plain of silver-white sand, covered with the salt efflorescence exactly as a thick hoar-frost covers a smooth grass lawn in the winter, and sparkling, like that, with prismatic colour, wherever not broken into by the asters and lavender and the few mourning plumes of tamarisks that sprinkled it here and there. To the east the green swamps bordering the Valcaïres were moving with their world of cranes, storks, ducks, and

flamingoes, while beyond these the grey water was seen stretching on that side to the horizon. Southwards, the boundless blue sea and the boundless blue sky met, like two “for-evers,” each striving to contain the immensity of the other. On the west only, some signs of higher vegetation were discernible—the line of willows and *salicors*, and gigantic grasses and shrubs which grew along the Petit Rhone. And in front of these trees were arranged the *cabaous*;—the household furniture which is brought out from all the neighbouring *mas*, or farmhouses, and piled into a sort of fortification, behind which the carts and other vehicles are ranged in shelter. The *cabaous*, therefore, make a kind of list, within which the brave cattle-dealers joust with the fierce bullocks now about to be branded and take their distinctive place in the wild herds ranging from one *téradou* to another of the Lower Camargue. The first level beams had scarcely yet darted across the intense blue sea; the first long rosy dawn cloud had not yet been swallowed up by the heat; nevertheless, there was already a crowd of charettes and spectators behind the *cabaous*, talking, laughing, cooking in various utensils brought for the purpose, while some had even advanced so far as the eating and drinking stage. Beyond the line of carts, that is at the northerly margin of the *cabaous*, vast droves of bulls and bullocks were stationed in a terrible phalanx and living barrier, which it would have required a very desperate bullock indeed to face; for it

is one of the strangest characteristics of the *ferrade*, that the bulk of the herds are accustomed to "keep the ground" and act police towards those special *bouls*' who are to undergo the punishment of branding. Perhaps no more wonderful instance can be found of fierce animals ranging themselves under the standard of conquering man, on the side of order and government, than this of the bull herds of the Camargue. Among the earliest arrivals were Rambert's immense droves, duly preceded by Oriflamme, with his scarlet-sashed bell, while Les Rochers, as usual, in sullen glory, was led in unwilling triumph behind, like Caradoc into Rome.

Rambert had much grief on his mind, as we all know, but that did not prevent him from stationing his cattle in the best position for their own comfort and general usefulness; neither did it hinder his joining a fellow cattle-guard, with whom he was on somewhat more sociable terms than was his general custom, and with whose help he made a fine fire of dried *bousc* and pine-cones, to boil their huge pot of coffee. A good jorum of strong coffee, with plenty of boiled milk, a huge lunch of polenta-bread, and a bunch of sun-dried grapes, or raisins, whichever name may be chosen, made in their eyes a breakfast fit for a king; and while the two cattle-guards, Rambert and Sardou, with four great watch-dogs, ate and drank, they laughed and jested as if no trouble had ever come across their two light hearts. But when they had ex-

tinguished their fire and separated for the day's work, Rambert mounted his second *aigue*, and rode very slowly all along the line of the *cabaous*, carefully inspecting every face that was there; and as he did so, every vestige of laughter or gaiety had utterly vanished from his dark face. He seemed to be seeking some one, but it could not surely be Noël, with that face?

A great deal was to be seen behind and among the *cabaous*, if he had had the eyes to note it. Brown-faced, laughing girls, far more ready to flirt than to eat, and quite willing to show the gigantic cattle-guard favour, if his disdainful great eyes had condescended to recognize and respond to the glances of their long, almond ones. Women of all ages seemed to take to Rambert, with that strange, instinctive longing women have for power and strength. There were pretty townswomen too, in all manner of bright colours and smart town garments, from Arles, the great civilized capital looked upon throughout the Camargue as *par excellence*, the fountain of fashion in their eyes. There were *Saintins*, too (women of Les Stes Maries), with the pretty head-dress and more polished manners than were known on the *tiradous*; and there were fishermen and their wives from the Mediterranean *rudes*, nearly as black as negroes, and with the uncouth projecting features which in Provence and Lower Languedoc betray the intermingling of Arab blood. And among the crowded varieties of their kind, but min-

gling familiarly with none, there were wild gipsy-women with their gleaming, blue-black eyes and purplish hair, dressed in bright yellows and reds and rich browns, whose tongues and eyes, and glittering teeth, and rapid motions, and wild music, seemed to put the climax of some new life to the marvellous scene.

All this, though Rambert saw it without seeing, was beheld by other eyes with delighted amazement.

"Look there, old fellow!" said a tall, fair-bearded man to his companion. "Did you ever think it would be our lot to see anything like that?"

"No, I cannot say I did, nor that it was to be seen in Europe at all. It is more like some Arab encampment, or a gathering in Asia Minor, or the Syrian desert. You really ought to take down some of these groups, Leo, before they have at all faded from your mind. Just look at that big fellow on the lovely grey barb; he might sit for the Sheikh Abraham, or the Emir Job. That is what I call a true 'dark splendid' face."

"Why, I rather think he is going to make a sketch of us," replied Morland, fixing his eyes upon him. "What the deuce is the fellow taking stock of us in that way for, and with such a very kill-joy face, too?"

The "fellow" was, of course, no other than Rambert, who, having caught sight of our two friends, seemed at once to have found what he had been seeking, and rode very slowly towards and close up to them, with

his eyes fixed steadily upon Morland, and certainly with his dark face growing darker than usual as he made his inspection. Having apparently satisfied his curiosity, the cattle-guard was about to turn his horse in another direction, but some thought freshly struck him, and he drew up close beside Morland, to whom he made a rough salutation, and said,

“Pardon, sir, but may I ask if you and your companion have been lately staying at a farm called Cabridelle ?”

“Why do you ask ?” said Nasmyth, suddenly stepping before Leopold, and touching him at the same time on the arm.

“Not from mere curiosity, sir, I assure you ; I know Nicole Privas well. He will be here by-and-by, and I could ask him just as easily, but I would rather be open with yourself.”

“Open !” repeated Morland ; “what is it all about ? We *were* both at Cabridelle, and came across the Camargue from there not many days since.”

“I thank you, sir. I knew you would tell me ; you are a real gentleman, that I know, and to my cost.”

“Well, I think it is my turn to ask questions now,” said Morland good-humouredly. “How am I or my concerns in any way to your cost, by which, I suppose, you mean that I have injured you in some way ? I think I never saw you before, did I ?”

“No, sir, nor I you,” Rambert replied slowly. “I will tell you frankly what I mean, sir. It is my wish

to have Noël Privas for my wife, and by God's help I *will* have her! Her father wishes it; her grandmother wishes it; and I think she herself would have wished it, if you had not stepped in between us and raised her fancy with something new. Sir, you have done a great injury to me and to all of us by coming out of your class to make love. We are all working people, on one level, and of the same country, and we could have been happy all our lives if you had not come here to upset and disturb us. You have done us all a great wrong, and it will be well if it is not visited on you. We are wild, rough people in these parts, and you would do well to look to yourself, sir."

"My good fellow, do not try on any bullying. Do you mean that my life will be threatened? I will not believe so ill of the people here, who are some of the honestest and most honourable I ever saw. I am very sorry indeed to have become in any way your rival. I suppose you are the cattle-guard of whom I have heard, and that your name is Lambert? I say again, I am most heartily sorry, but I cannot on that account make any pretence of giving up my right for your sake. I will fight you, if you like, in our English way, with fists, or wrestle with you, or ride a race with you, but I cannot give up Noël to you unless she tells me that she prefers you herself. You know she is gone to Aigues Mortes now, to stay a while in the convent. If she decides there

in your favour; then you know we must both shake hands, and I shall go back to England and try to forget her the best I can. But if she decides for me, Rambert, then you must be a man and strive to do the same. Will you shake hands now, and say you will do this?"

Rambert sat, as he had done when talking with the douanier Pipet, like a coloured marble statue on his horse. Then his dark eyes flashed, and his brows bent till they met, as he answered, "There is no such thing as forgetting to us Camargascans! We can love and we can hate, and we can kill and we can die, but as to forgiving and forgetting when the love and the hate are burnt into our very flesh, that is child's talk, fit only for children at play. No! I will not hand shake with you, sir; but some time soon we shall meet one another face to face, and see which can fight to the death for his love. Till then, farewell, sir!"

He dashed the long spurs into his fiery horse, who leaped off his four legs into the air, and then galloped away at lightning speed across the plain.

"I don't quite know if I have got a knife put into my ribs or a bullet into my heart," said Morland, striving to carry himself well, but failing to shake off a sharp inward gnawing of the remorse which now seldom left him. "What is to be done, dearest old Conscience, in this crisis of my fate?"

"Easily asked, not easily answered, dear old Leo," said Nasmyth cheerily. "Let us at all events get out

of the lists, and towards the ropes, for I think the fun is going to begin in earnest."

He took Morland's arm to rouse and turn him round, and they both moved away towards the *cabanous*, for the cattle-guards were riding about and pricking up some of the bullocks with their tridents, who answered the compliment by loud roaring and bellowing, and beginning to lash their tails and butt at the horses and men. After a little while, a good number of *boucles* were detached from the mass of cattle, and driven along in a southerly direction, stamping and pawing up the sand with rage. Now, it turned out that none of the cattle-guards seemed very anxious to begin the ball, and satisfied themselves with riding about poking up the *boucles*, or stirring the enormous fire, where the branding irons were heating. This delay seemed specially distasteful to Rambert, and he dashed after, or rather past, the drove of bullocks, pulled up Bayard a little in advance of them, sprang to the ground, leaving his horse loose, and seizing one of the most furious bullocks by the horns, actually threw him on the ground like a child, by main force, where he lay kicking and struggling, but captive. Then a mighty shout of rapturous applause burst out, above which was heard the cry of "The irons! the irons!" and several other cattle-guards flew to the brazier, caught up the red-hot irons with the thick leather pads by which the handles were guarded, and rushed with them to Rambert, who branded the poor

quivering beast with a rudely shaped initial-letter on the haunch, and drove him away bellowing and foaming, to seek some relief by rolling in the marsh slime. While they were checked and headed by the cattle-guards, Rambert flew at one bullock after another of the herd, and after many tussles brought them all to the ground, subjected to the cruel hot irons. But before they were all branded he had received three rather deep wounds from their horns as he struggled with them on the ground.

"What a splendid fellow!" Nasmyth exclaimed, with intense admiration, as Rambert coolly wiped the blood from his third wound and bound it up tight with his handkerchief. "What a splendid fellow! He is as cool now as when he began, and just as ready to begin it all over again. I am very sorry it has happened so——" and he stopped short.

"Don't stop yourself; say out what you were thinking," said Morland, a little bitterly. "You mean you are sorry he is not the successful one with Noël. Hang it all! I am not sure that I am not sorry too! He is worth a great deal more than I am, on more grounds than muscular Christianity, in which he beats me altogether hollow. Well! perhaps she will 'think better of it,' you know, in the convent, and perhaps I may get letters. Very odd I don't get one, by-the-by. I believe they have been stopped by 'Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality,' as suspicious foreign correspondence—eh?"

"Well, I can't say; but anyhow we cannot go on dawdling about these marshes much longer. A very few warm days would make that quite an absurdity," said Nasmyth. "So do you go now and make what sketches you want for the future from this scene, and then, after Les Stes. Maries, we had better pull up sticks. Halloo! look out! What is coming to pass? There's a man down!"

What had come to pass was that one of the cattle-guards had gone in among the patriarch bulls, in search of one obstinate unmarked bullock, and had thereby stirred up the wrath of Les Rochers, who had now come out in one of his worst moods, screaming with rage, pawing up huge clumps of sand and aromatic herbs, and throwing them high in the air. As the clods fell down upon the other conscript fathers of the assembly, they did not see the joke, and first moved uneasily, bellowing to match, and then suddenly broke and spread down the lines, throwing everything and everybody into utter confusion. Les Rochers, with his own peculiar vicious obstinacy, concentrated his attentions upon the man who had stirred him up, and having slightly gored his horse, the *aigre* plunged till he threw his rider, and threw him, too, straight in the path of the bull, who was now advancing with his head down and a frightful roar. The poor cattle-guard was doomed to death in the eyes of all present, when Nasmyth, with his enormous strength of arm, wrenched out a barrier pole from the *cabaous*, and rushed upon the

palusin in the rear, seizing him by the tail, and battering him with good English strokes till the ferocious beast gave up his first object, and turned short round to slay his new opponent, who was greeted by the assembled crowds with a true southern transport of admiring applause. Rambert then galloped up, and with his cruel trident struck the bull a few sharp blows, and by the help of his *doudaire* Oriflamme, who had put himself on full duty as watch-dog, Les Rochers was driven off into a marsh-thicket to recover his temper and assuage the smart of his wounds as he best could. The air, meanwhile, rang with shouts and cries of applause, and the cattle-guards and their owners gathered in crowds round the "English lord," offering him horses, carts, brandy, and whatever was at their command; and the wife of the rescued cattle-guard, with her child in her arms, flew to kiss his hands and pour upon him a shower of Provençal blessings. Nasmyth only laughed at them all good-humouredly, got his hands out of reach as soon as he could, and repeated that he had done nothing at all, and was only too glad just to have been in the way. And he laughed again, in his good, English, unboastful way, as they got hold of what he called his "stick," a pole which none of the men there, except Rambert, could move, and marvelled at his power of arm. He then lifted his hat courteously to the women, who had clustered about him like bees, and turned away to look for Morland, that they might make their

way towards some shelter for the night at Les Stes. Maries.

But Leopold had unaccountably disappeared. Nasmyth quested up and down, inquiring in all directions in vain, and at last, somewhat uneasy and vexed—for the day was going on, and he was doubtful what to do—he employed some of the gipsy men to go in various directions towards the swamps, and among the thickets on the river side. He began to think that when Leopold had been driven from his station, as the herd of bulls dispersed, he had taken advantage of the scattering to go to a distance to sketch some of the groups he had been intending to take while the morning light was on the scene. Knowing his enthusiasm when actually at work, and his absolute forgetfulness of all lapse of time, Nasmyth calmed his uneasiness with this idea, and having now dispatched five men and boys in search, he sat down behind the *cabanas*, near the charette occupied by the women belonging to the rescued cattle-guard, and tried to occupy himself in watching them and their warm-hearted delight at boiling for him some coffee and milk, and roasting a few eggs in the wood ashes.

But the sun went up and up, till it slowly passed its meridian, and then began to slope towards the west, and still no Morland was to be seen, nor did the messengers return with any tidings. And the long bars of cranes in their flight looked like funeral pennons stretched across the solemn sky.

CHAPTER XVI.

RAMBERT OFFERS HIS LIFE.

LEOPOLD had—as his friend justly imagined—wandered away to take his sketches while he might. He had sprung aside from Nasmyth—not seeing the man thrown from his horse—when the herd of *palusins* scattered towards him along the plain, and as men lose one another and see no two details in the same light during a battle, so he had been driven on, by the rush of cattle and the pursuit of their mounted guards, far away from Nasmyth, and towards the marshy thickets to the eastward, where the extraordinary beauty of various groups and bits of colour completely absorbed his eye and mind ; and, as usual with him when in the “fine frenzy” of painting, he lost all sense of time and almost the consciousness of himself. He unstrapped his little knapsack, took out his precious little thick box of moist colours and brushes and a block, and began to jot down with his usual speed and facility a number of figures and their surroundings. At first these groups were numerous,

and one interest was constantly exchanged for another; but by degrees the people scattered away to see the end of the *ferrade*, and there remained only cattle in twos and threes, and one passing vision of Rambert, who glared at Leopold and then galloped away.

Having occupied himself for some time in taking great pains to transfer that magnificent dark head to paper, Leopold wished to examine more minutely the clumps of grand reeds and flowering canes which should serve as future backgrounds growing some way further on, and accordingly he pushed his way through the shrubby rosemary and lentisk, till he found himself directly in front of a splendid thicket of *salicor* and canes in flower. Leopold had sketched them in outline and was busy filling in, when he saw some movement among them, heard a trampling and crashing without any visible cause, and then a low roar like ground thunder, which filled the air. The thick cane-clump split asunder, then Morland saw the head and horns of Les Rochers, who had been roused from an uneasy respite of sleep by his approach, and whose rage and wounds made him at this moment especially combative and terrible to look at.

Leopold, now fully roused, at once took in the extreme danger he was in. He was weaponless, not having even a walking-stick in his hand. His umbrella-stick he had left with his bag near the *cabaous*, where Nasmyth, all unconscious, was at that moment looking

on at the preparation of his coffee. The bull, meanwhile, having made his survey with that peculiarly insolent stare, which is after the manner of bulls, stamped his feet and tore up the earth, preparatory to rushing forward to gore and toss his prey. Though not constitutionally fearless, Leopold was brave with the bravery of an educated gentleman, and as he gathered his whole strength about him for defence, he shut up his colour-box with a sharp snap, and bowled it with a true cricketer's aim straight between the animal's eyes, springing directly afterwards to one or two dwarf oaks a little way off, behind which he thought he might get shelter. At the same time he sent up a ringing halloo to call for help of any one who might be within hearing. Les Rochers was for the moment so blinded by the blow, that he did not see his foe's last movement, but very soon recovering, he dashed forward with a hoarse roar, or almost scream, of aggravated fury, and nearly succeeded in pinning Leopold through the body against one of the oaks. He dodged, only tearing off the lappet of his coat, upon which the bull pawed and stamped with a fury which was horrible to witness. Leopold then shouted in a succession of Australian *cœoey*s, while dodging his enemy from one tree trunk to another, and feeling that his strength was fast going, while the horrible beast seemed to grow stronger and fiercer with every fresh attack. He was just giving up his last hope when a loud crackling and crashing was heard

among the reeds, and Bayard, with Rambert on his back, bounded forward, the cattle-guard wounding Les Rochers deeply on the flank with his trident. The two huge dogs at the same instant flew at his head and turned him off into the thicket, where they pursued him barking and baying, but at the same time by no means inducing him to give up the attack. Rambert's dark face seemed to Morland at that moment more terrible than the bull's. He had sprung off his horse, and seized Leopold in his strong arms.

"Ha!" he said in a deep low voice, "we *have* met face to face, as I said. I did not think it would be so soon. Look yonder! There comes the bull again, and when he is dangerous like that he will gore his master as easily as a stranger. Quick! it is life or death between us two! Will you give Noël Privas to me? Say yes, and I will put you on my horse, and save your life!—quick!"

"No, Rambert, I will not. I can but die once, but I will be faithful to my Love. Let me die; but be sure you tell her and my friend what happened to me. My poor Harry! I wish I could have said just one good-bye!"

Rambert was now grasping him by the throat, to gain time. The crashing in the reeds had come nearer—the bull would be back directly—one dog was already killed, dying with a dismal howl; the other was desperately wounded, and he could not much longer keep the bull at bay. Should he let this

miserable Englishman be slain in his folly, and thus end the whole contest easily and at once ? He deserved it richly, for putting himself where he had no business to be. But what would Noël say to him when the Englishman was dead ? How would her eyes question him ? Would she moan over *him* as she would moan over this fair-bearded puppet ? What then ? If Noël loved him, was not that enough ? Noël should be pleased and made happy. If he could not make her happy by his life, he would die for her, and then, perhaps, she would know how to measure his great love.

How it happened Morland never knew, but suddenly he felt himself pitched upon Bayard like a child, and a cut given to the barb, which sent him galloping madly towards the plain ; crashing among the canes, splashing across the reedy marshes, seeming to devour the burning sands. Without his cap, with torn clothes, with bleeding face and hands, Leopold ran his race for life, nor did the good horse stop till he had brought him nearly to the *cabaous*, where Nasmyth and the assembled crowd hailed him as one newly risen from death.

* * * * *

But in the cane-brake the two dogs bled to death, and Lambert was lying on his back, with his "dark splendid" face turned towards the cloudless sky. The sun sloped westward, the long flight of cranes lessened in the golden sky, and the bittern and

heron flitted, booming faintly, in the evening light, when they found the noble cattle-guard, and laid him upon a quickly-wattled bier of reeds, to take him to Les Stes. Maries for burial.

[CHAPTER XVII.]

RAMBERT'S BURIAL.—LES STES. MARIES.

DID any one of all the throng of spectators who witnessed that burial ever forget it? I think it must have been before their eyes, and in their minds always. To begin with, could any one who has ever seen it forget Les Stes. Maries? I trow not.

What it might be at another time I cannot take upon myself to say, for the first aspect of a strange place stamps its own indelible seal upon the mind and memory for ever after. Be it gay or sad, bright or gloomy, on the first impression, so will its colouring remain through all changes afterwards. Les Stes. Maries to me, therefore, will always be one of the quaintest, brightest, most populous, and most startling towns that ever met my eyes. But then I saw it at the time of its great Feast. The unstained blue of the sea that washes its yellowing walls, the ramparted and turreted yellowing walls themselves, and the equally sun-tinted vast pile of the marvellous old church, built up in three stories, like that of Assisi, are cer-

tainly neither bright nor cheerful in themselves. There is, however, a warm, solemn sun-tint about them, which stamps their age with a kind of Eternal Present, like the Temples of Luxor and the Egyptian Thebes. But on the great sandy shore which is washed up there, and in the strange, picture-like streets, people were then swarming like ants in an ant-hill, and coloured with every variety of costume. Some wore enormous flat Montpellier hats; some were in caps, and casquettes, and white linen squared head-gear; some in bright coloured twisted handkerchief-turbans that betrayed eastern blood; while many more wore the favourite crown* of broad blue or red ribbon of the Arlesian girls. Pedlars and packmen of all kinds were selling out of bright trays and boxes, chaplets, rosaries, crosses, crucifixes, medals, and scapulars, with little framed and glazed pictures of the Three Marys. Everywhere the Saintins or townspeople were greeting the stranger visitors and pilgrims; talking, laughing, and flirting with them, carrying them to their houses to entertain them, or making little parties for the same end round small tables set under the old walls, or on the crumbling ramparts, or beneath some spreading fig-tree, or fantastic flowering shrub, that branched out of the wall and overhung the street. And the setting or framework of all this strange swarming life was no less picture-like than the body of

* The Arlesian maidens' crown answers to the old snood of Scotland.

the picture. Every year many of the Saintins cover their roofs with a thick coat of chalk, as a defence from the glaring heat; and these clean-cut snow-white high roofs and dormers stood out strangely against the sombre colouring of the darker turrets and walls. And the three-tiered old church rose up with its towers and arcades and buttresses, commanding the whole town, and serving as a citadel and landmark, as well as a shrine, attracting the deepest devotion for many leagues round.

Towards this church, furrowing a lane between the rows of blind, and lame, and maimed, and smitten with all types of mysterious and terrible disease, wound Rambert's burial procession. First, the lofty processional cross, a curious old carved crucifix belonging to the confraternity, was borne by one of the brotherhood, and on each side of it others of the brethren, bearing three-sided lanthorns on long poles, and strange looking staves topped with *fleur-de-lys*. Then a long file of brothers, called Black Penitents, chanting in very rich, deep voices the office for the dead. The open bier, wreathed roughly, but with marvellous taste, with cypress, feathered reeds, and white asters, upon which lay the giant form of Rainbert, with his hands clasped over a crucifix, and his dark, noble face stamped with an expression of perfect peace, was borne by six cattle-guards of the Camargue, each with the black cloak of the brotherhood, but no other signs of mourning. Immediately after the bier, led by black-bound

ropes, came Bayard saddled, Oriflamme the *dondaire* of Rambert's herd, and his two watch-dogs, walking slowly and sorrowfully, with drooped heads and tails depressed, as if they fully shared the general grief. Privas, one of the first to follow, could not hold up his head, and his whole frame was so bowed down and smitten with sorrow, that he looked as if ten years had been suddenly added to his life. After these, the chief mourners, followed the remainder of the guards and cattle-owners of the region, then a long line of Black Penitents, and lastly, the Curé and clergy, in black stoles and copes. Every one following the bier had a lighted candle in his hand. Among the crowd who pressed after the clergymen, the foremost were Nasmyth and Morland, whose grief for the dead cattle-guard was scarcely less keen than that of any present, though it was characteristically undemonstrative and controlled. The conviction that Rambert had given his life up for him for Noël's sake—the highest token of love that any man can give, and that one which raises him the nearest to One Who offered His life for the world—had opened Leopold's heart to stronger feeling and deeper emotion than he had ever yet experienced. Had he at this crisis possessed, like the rough cattle-guard whom a girl's fancy had despised, a divinely-taught, definite faith upon which to fall back, Morland might have been for life a sadder and wiser man. Now he was deeply impressed, but, as usual, the impression wore away.

And now the body was in the church before the altar, and the chanting, under the high vaulted roof, took a more solemn tone. The incense floated upwards in a slow, fragrant cloud, and the priests sprinkled holy water and prayed. Often as Nasmyth and Morland had heard the words, they now seemed instinct with fresh meaning.

“Ego sum resurrectio et vita: qui credit in Me, etiam si mortuus fuerit, vivet: et omnis, qui vivit, et credit in Me, non morietur in æternum.”

“Requiem æternam dona ei Domine:”

“Et lux perpetua luceat ei:”

Then they took up the dead, and lowered him into the deep grave made ready for him, heaped it up with the dry sand, and trode it firmly down. And all the women came forward, and threw wreaths and cypress boughs upon it, till it was piled up into a green, fragrant mound.

But the two Englishmen came the last of all, and they laid gently on the mound a beautiful garland twined round with an inscription in French, which all could read—“Greater love than this no man hath, that a man should lay down his life for his friends.”

The next day every one in the town was astir very early, and the church was crowded with pilgrims and their friends. It was the eve of the Feast,* and circles of people were clustered thick about the confessionals, which were served by not only the Curé and his

* The Festival of the Three Marys is kept on the 25th of May.

vicaires, but by a number of the neighbouring parish priests, and a few regulars, or priests of monastic orders, who had come in to take their turn in the relays that were necessary to get through the enormous number of confessions to be heard.

The wide reach of sand spreading before the almost wave-washed yellow walls of the old building was covered with biers, litters, charettes with awnings, and all kinds of devices for bringing in the lame, and blind, and wasted sick, who expected to be miraculously cured on the morrow, when the shrines containing the relics of the Three Marys would be lowered down for them to touch. If the sick and their means of transport were too numerous to be got into the church, the priests would go out to them later, and hear their confessions on the strand.

Very wonderful was the inside aspect of that old church, built up in three stages at the east end, the two uppermost of which are reached by winding stairs curiously twisted round the shafts of pillars. Behind the altar, the first stage above the ground was of considerable extent, and many of the most disabled or sick, or such as brought special letters from bishops or exvotos of price, were carried up there on the Feast to be nearest the holy relics. The uppermost stage, where the cypress-wood shrines were kept, was carefully secured with strong doors, which only one of the priests, whose charge it was, was allowed to unlock, at the appointed times.

The whole space of the church walls, from floor to roof, was crusted with exvotos of all kinds and shapes and materials. Gold and silver hearts, or hearts of rock crystal set in gold, with gold, and silver, and crystal lamps, were the most general of those of any real value. The rest were made up of legs, arms, eyes, ears, and hearts of every conceivable size and grotesqueness; varying in material from thin silver, or silver gilt, to wax and wood. Myriads of marble and stone tablets, and pictures portraying every imaginable accident, and the deliverance from it at the intercession of the Three Marys, were also let into the walls, pavement, pillars, and even the roof. The effect of this singular heterogeneous mosaic, softened by the influence of time, and dimmed by the undertone of the darkened church, and its variety of sub-lights, was nearly as solemn as that of St. Mark's at Venice. Nasmyth felt the influence of the place sink into his soul; and, as he knelt in the church, he could not help casting a glance mentally at his own country and circle of belongings and intimate friends who had never seen, who could never imagine, anything outside that circle, and whose minds were rigidly bound within the magic of its small extent. Ignorance, and superstition, and besotted blindness, would be the gentlest terms in their vocabulary for the wonderful emotions now developed before him. Rambert was, no doubt, "ignorant." Of later years he could scarcely read or write, and of the reasons and proofs of his faith he

could probably give as slender an account as of his own practice of its duties. "Superstitious," too, he doubtless was, for nothing would ever induce him to drive his cattle to fresh pastures on a Friday; he believed in charms when they were sick, and tied witch-herbs to their horns to keep them from falling under enchantment every spring. He also believed in the evil eye, and had a charm against it tied round his own neck, though it was nothing worse than the first few lines of St. John's Gospel written on a paper, doubled up and sewn into a little bag. "Besottedly blind," too, he might be called, for he did not think any but Catholics were Christians, baptized men, or able to be saved and enter Heaven. But—so ran the tenor of Nasmyth's thoughts—but compare him with any chance drayman, van-driver, bricklayers' labourer, or costermonger, in any crowded part of London. Compare that rough, bronzed, shaggy-haired cattle-guard to any one whose day is spent in filling himself with beer or spirits, either stupefying his brain till he becomes lower and more loathsome than a brute, or maddening it till murderous passion leads him and others to a violent end; whose thoughts are of drink and eating; whose actions and words are unspeakably filthy; whose only knowledge of God, and of eternity, and of his soul, are to swear and blaspheme, or to deny and destroy. No one can doubt for an instant that the populations of our towns are rapidly pursuing this downward road; that they are growing more degraded, vile, lewd, and

brutal, year by year, and that no influences can be brought even to bear upon their intellect, while drunkenness is the rule and staple happiness of their life. The ignorant and superstitious emotions of Les Stes. Maries might prove a better substitute ; and most assuredly Rambert, who returned to some teaching of his youth in sacrificing his life for his enemy, was to be preferred to the London drayman.

So thought Nasmyth, deeply mourning in his heart over the grand cattle-guard, whose happiness they had destroyed by their coming, and now had deprived him of his life.

And how, meanwhile, was Morland feeling ? Nasmyth glanced towards him, wondering if now, at last, Leo would feel deeply, would permanently change his light, roving, butterfly course, and buckle to as a good man and true for the rest of his life. Morland had certainly been deeply, or rather *vividly*, impressed by Rambert's death and his own escape. He thought he *should* now " buckle to," as Nasmyth was always saying, and make Noël really happy as a wife. If there were some sacrifice in the matter, well, he had run his own head into it, and he could not and would not draw back. If his father made it very disagreeable to him, he would cut the whole concern and stay out in France, sending his pictures home every year. He should make an artist's home in Paris, high up in some airy old hotel in the Faubourg St. Germain, where Noël would be like a sunbeam to him all day long, and

he should get at the secret of those wonderful French grey undertones, and be able to teach them something brighter and less *genre*. A man with genius could make his home and his mark anywhere, and his sisters would be glad enough to come over and stay with his little wife, whom they would pet and admire all day long. Poor Rambert! What a grand fellow he was, and how sorry he was for having spoilt his life and got him into such an end. What a grand, noble fellow! It was just like a story, from beginning to end. And perhaps it had ended well, after all. Rambert was very fierce and terrible when his blood was up, and he might even have taken it into his head to murder poor little Noël, or himself. He should not at all enjoy being murdered: life was too bright, and sunny, and high-coloured just now for him to enjoy being put out of the way like a reptile that has no business with the sunshine and green hillside. After all, perhaps, it was for the best, and he would think so, and act as if it were true. Meanwhile, what a glorious, rich undertone was now spreading through the church. He must make the most of all these shifting revelations—this letting out, as it were, of secret after secret of colour. Such was the course of Leopold's mind.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"FAREWELL, MY LOVE, MY LIFE."

"IF you please, Mother Abbess, there is a strange gentleman at the *portière*, asking for Mdlle. Privas."

"What is his name ? "

"I do not know, Mother Abbess. He gave me this little bit of printed paper, but I don't think there is much in it." The portress handed the Superior a card, on which were printed simply two words in very small type—

Leopold Morland.

Scribbled below the name in pencil was, "Can I see Mademoiselle Privas ? "

"That will do, Sister Maura ; I will go down myself."

The simple portress opened her eyes till they were quite round at the fact of Mother Abbess going down herself to the parlour to see a gentleman, whom, indeed, she only called a gentleman, with the universal courtesy of the country ; while in truth she thought him some sort of workman, with his burnt straw hat,

and grey linen blouse, and long, tanned beard. For Sister Maura's eyes had travelled no higher than the beard. She abstained, of course, from unnecessary words, and merely bowed low as she trotted away with her keys.

The Abbess wiped the pen with which she had been writing, unbuttoned and let down her long ample sleeves, and took her way with her accustomed slow, trained step along the galleries and down the stairs to the parlour, opened the door, and there saw Leopold standing up beside the stone fireplace, apparently studying an old print of the Three Marys at the Sepulchre, but really counting the moments till Noël should appear. He turned round hastily, stretching out his hand, but coming face to face with the stately figure in flowing Benedictine habit, he drew back, instantly recovered himself and bowed low, instinctively recognizing the Superior of the convent.

"I am very sorry to disturb this peaceful place, Madam, but I am about to return to England, and I wished to see Mademoiselle Privas before I left France."

"You are M. Morland, I suppose?" said the Abbess. "I had heard of you; I am not sorry to see you myself, and to have a few minutes' conversation. How long have you to stay in the town?"

"I must get on to Nismes this afternoon, Madam. My friend is staying at Les Stes. Maries for the Feast to-morrow, and then will join me at Nismes."

"I will, then, be very brief," said the Abbess. "And,

also, I think it will be best to speak as frankly as possible, with your leave."

"It will be the truest kindness, Madam," said Leopold. "I believe I have the honour of speaking to the Superior, but I am so ignorant as not to know your right title."

"I am generally called Lady Abbess," she said, with a smile, "but that is of no consequence at all. M. Morland, I think I should begin by saying that I know that you have engaged Noël Privas to marry you, without her father's consent, and in so doing you have not acted, according to the custom of our country, in a right way. You should first have spoken to her father, and especially as Mdlle. Privas is very young."

"Accurately speaking, Lady Abbess, I know I ought to have done so. But in practice, I think, even your experience in life must show you that these kind of things are generally hurried forward without premeditation. With us English, especially, men and women are so universally accustomed to settle their own love matters with one another, and afterwards to refer to their parents, that I allowed myself to be carried farther than I intended. When, afterwards, I spoke to M. Privas, he certainly did not—as I should say—behave well to me."

"I dare say. He is a man of strong feelings, and he thought you had undermined his authority. A parent in Provence, M. Morland, is the supreme judge in his family affairs, and we should not wish this tradition to

be changed. M. Privas has also, I understand, made other arrangements for his daughter's future. Do you not think, M. Morland, that Noël's happiness would be better secured by her marrying in her own class?"

"I could not in any case agree that Noël would be happier married to any one but myself, Lady Abbess," replied Morland, with quickness. Then, recovering his ordinary gentleness, he added, "I am sorry to tell you—sorry, I mean, for the cause, which I assure you is a most real sorrow to both my friend and myself—I am grieved to tell you that the cattle-guard, Rambert, whom M. Privas had chosen as his son-in-law, is dead and was buried here to-day."

"Dead!" exclaimed the Abbess. "That young, strong, gigantic man! Is it possible? How shockingly sudden!" She folded her hands for a moment, and said, in a low voice, "'Requiescat in pace. Requiem æternam dona ei Domine; et lux perpetua luceat ei!'" That, then, was why the bells were tolling so long. The portress asked our good father, but he could only say that the Confraternities seemed to be following some great burial, and that 'un mort' had been brought in from the country. Well, sir, I will not detain you. The poor man's death, of course, gives you a fresh opening with M. Privas, but there are other difficulties. Your religion, first of all. Should you be willing to be married in the Catholic Church, and to have your children brought up Catholics? I should tell you that I am Noël's godmother, and you know, with us, the

marraine does not only give a silver cup or an embroidered robe, but has also to answer for her god-child's faith and morals. Do your parents consent to your marriage, in the only way we can allow her to marry, with a Catholic?"

"Lady Abbess, I grieve to tell you that my only parent, my father, will not consent to my marrying a Catholic, nor is he, in fact, friendly to my marrying at all at this minute. The question of religion is, of course, one great difficulty, though I think, with him, that could be got over,—but there are also money obstacles which are not so easy to overcome. I am the eldest of a family of six, and though my father's income is a handsome one, his expenses are also very considerable. I have received this morning a long-delayed letter from him, absolutely refusing his consent to my marrying at present, and strongly advising me to give up my engagement altogether; and as soon as I had read it I immediately set off across the country to try to see Noël, and to make known all the circumstances of our case to you. I must own to you that I am much surprised, as well as heartily grieved, at the tone of my father's letter, for I thought that he would see that I was in earnest, and that this marriage would be for my real good."

"You think that if you married Noël you would settle down to your work, and make something of your life?"

"I do, Lady Abbess; and more than that, I think—

I think I should settle down to be a much wiser and better man."

"I do not doubt it," replied the Abbess kindly, fully appreciating both the words and the colour which spread over Leo's face as he frankly spoke them. "I trust also that Noël's example would not be lost on you, for indeed, Mr. Morland, she is a good and most innocent, pure-minded child. If she must marry—which I suppose is the state of life she is fittest for—I should be glad to know that she had a good, high-minded husband, who would carefully guard her from evil. But what do you propose to do now, after receiving your father's letter?"

"I must hasten back to England immediately and try to shake his purpose," replied Leopold quickly. "I am his eldest son, he is a most affectionate father, and I have an excellent sister who, if I can win her to take up my cause, will do far more for me than I can for myself."

"And if he will not listen to you?"

"Then I shall take my own course. I am old enough now to choose and judge for myself."

"Yes, of course you are amply *majeur*," said the Abbess, "but have you any property absolutely your own?"

"About—between four and five thousand francs yearly," replied Leopold, remembering just in time that pounds were Hebrew to a nun at Aigues Mortes.

"But that is good, very good," she said. "You are, then, quite an independent man?"

"In this country I should be so," replied Leopold, smiling. "In England it would go but a very little way towards the expenses of a household. But that was my second idea, Lady Abbess; and if my father will not listen to reason, I shall make up my mind to come back and live somewhere in the south of France, where it is possible and healthy, and send my pictures every year to England. This is what I should like to talk over with Noël now, with your leave."

"You have it fully," said the Abbess; "and as I know your time is limited, I will send her to you at once. I shall therefore bid you good-bye, Mr. Morland, and we shall hope before very long to see you in this country again."

Leopold bowed as he would have done to a princess, for the true dignity and worth of Mère Bauget had won his respect, no less than her excellent common sense had commanded his admiration.

It was not long before the swift approach of other sounding feet was heard in the corridor, and almost before the door flew open Noël's two hands were in his. More lovely, more bright, more charming than ever; soon all in tears at his narrative of Rainbert's end; all radiant with speaking smiles and blushes for him and his deliverance; and then with her lovely, shadowing eyes more shadowed, and the paleness even

more speaking than her blushes, as he related to her the details of his father's letter, reading to her the less objectionable and unreasonable parts, and softening the terms of his irrational and ignorant dislike to herself. The strength, and discretion, and thoughtfulness Noël had gained in her interval of rest were very striking to Morland. He had thought her perfect before, though it was rather the perfection of exceeding prettiness, and the added wilful young grace, as kittens and fawns are perfect in every movement. But now Noël appeared to him to have grown towards some higher life, touched with finer and more impalpable issues ; and while his love for her was even tenderer than ever, Leopold felt an increasing reverence and observance for the lovely womanhood that seemed, like Undine's, to have found its soul. In deeply interesting talk the minutes sped away ; and long before they had ended the discussion of their plans, their mutual impressions as to the future, and the long catalogue of observances for Noël on Leopold's part, the westerly sunbeams were shining on the wall, the last grains of sand had run out from the great hour-glass on the table, and the upper half was empty of a single grain.—It was Noël who pointed to it.

“ You must go, love : you will never get to Nismes if you do not hurry to Lunel, now.” *

“ Yes, I must go,” replied Leopold, but holding her still, as if he could never release her from his hold.

* The railway goes from Lunel to Aigues Mortes now.

“ Good-bye, my birdie ! My *museadélo* of Provence ! Never forget me in your prayers, Noël.”

“ I never do, I never could ! Why, Leo mine, what are you thinking of ?”

“ My heart is so heavy, darling. Oh, if I could but take you with me ! God help me ! it is too hard !”

“ Trust in God, Leo mine ! Take heart ; you will soon come back to your own one. God guard you and lead you, my own, *own* Leo !”

Morland vaguely felt, through his anguish, how strangely their parts seemed reversed at this moment. How he drooped with nameless fears, while this young creature held him up as a strong staff and pillar, on which he absolutely leaned. It was she who, with her arm within his, drew him along the corridor and through the entrance-vestibule, and across the broad flags of the mossy courtyard. At a word from her, who seemed his guardian angel, he was drawn also for an instant within the old solemn church, and knelt beside her with one brief heart-prayer, before the altar. And on the worn doorstep of the church Noël let him bend his beaming head for one last solemn kiss ; and while she stood framed with the old fretted arch, he strode across the flags to the gate ; then the wicket-door closed upon him, and he was gone.

Was there no dumb aching in Noël’s heart, telling her she should see his face no more ?

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FEAST OF THE THREE MARYS.

NASMYTH, as Leopold had said, was waiting on at Les Stes. Maries for the feast. He had been exceedingly sorry for the elder Morland's letter; for, not satisfied with Anne's moderation and kindness, he had written most cantankerously himself in his first vexation and hurry: and it was Nasmyth who had urged Leopold to go to Aigues Mortes, and ask Mère Bauget's advice. But he could not be very sorry that his more mercurial and impressionable companion should not be with him during the festival ceremonies. Never had Nasmyth been more impressed by the current of popular devotion than now; and he felt as if he really needed to take the full good of it, and turn the time and opportunity to the utmost account. He was up and in the church soon after dawn, and placed himself conveniently where he would not be pushed and hustled away by the crowd, and where he could well witness the descent of the relics from the upper chapel. There was another

thing, too, by which he wished to profit, which was the short *prone*, or address, giving the traditional account of the first coming of the Three Marys to Provence, and how it fell out that they were buried in the Camargue. Nasmyth had hunted up and read everything he could find on the subject, and had amassed quite a collection of curious old legends and local traditions, having gone up to Les Baux while Morland went to Aigues Mortes, and examined the *Chapelle des Trois Maries*,* or three gigantic figures carved in relief under the castle of that unique city of the dead. At the annual Feast, he was told, a short account of its origin was always preached by one of the monks who came into the town to hear the confessions of the pilgrims.

Meanwhile, the church gradually filled fuller and fuller, as a lake rises by the silent influx of some hidden stream, and masses were going on at all the side chapels. Every half hour some fresh priest came out of the sacristies, vested, and a new mass began, announced by the silvery tongue of an unobtrusive little bell. And at every mass there were fresh communions, and the fervour and devotion of the people, closely packed as they were, seemed to increase instead of abating. At last a larger bell rang from somewhere ; the candles were lit at the high altar, and another

* Traditionally said to commemorate the coming of the saints to Les Baux, and being driven away, after which the town was ravaged by a dreadful plague.

stream of worshippers and a new stir seemed to flow into the densely-crowded church.

The mass began, and took its usual calm course through Introit, Gloria, Epistle, and Gospel, and then there followed a pause. Nasmyth looked up, and found that a tall, thin, white-habited monk was standing just inside the altar rails, facing him. His face recalled to him Savonarola: it was strong-featured, piercing, with a large but well-defined lower lip. It was a well-known Dominican father, and, in a clear, distinct, rapid utterance, full of an earnestness that could at will rise to passion, he began to tell the story of the Three Marys.

The sun had now fully risen, and long, slender rays came sloping through some upper window, and, falling aslant the picture-like higher chapels, fell on the shorn, dark crown and powerful face of the monk, and scattered coloured fragments over his white scapular. They glanced on the silver chains of the lamps and the laden orange trees in the sanctuary, while the whole dark mass of the people were in shadow. As the clear, deep tones of the voice began the story, Nasmyth felt as if he were borne away into some other world and age than the present, or as if he were dreaming a long dream.

* * * *

"Long ago, very long ago; nearly two thousand years now"—so the voice which seemed to Nasmyth the echo of some old dream was saying—"the Pharisees

and chief priests were much angered after they had crucified Christ, with certain of His friends and constant companions—Martha and Mary, and Lazarus, and Sidonius the man born blind, and Trophimus, and Maximin, and Mary of Salomé, and Mary the mother of James, whom Herod had slain with the sword. These faithful companions of Christ were therefore seized upon, and bound, and carried away to the sea shore, where they were thrust into a wretched boat, and pushed off from the land, without sails, oars, or rudder, to be driven wherever the winds should choose. The women wept as they saw the blessed land of their birth, the beloved hills of Judea and Galilee, and their towns and villages, vanishing from sight. They fixed their tearful eyes on Mount Carmel, which was sinking towards the horizon ; and even the strong men who were with them looked long and gravely at the mountain of the great Prophet, and at the broad plain of Esdraelon, which they were never more to see. ‘How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land ?’ said one to another ; but Trophimus answered, ‘ Let us praise the Lord, for His mercy endureth for ever ! ’

“Then they began to chant the sweet Psalms of David, and were strengthened and comforted in heart.

“But soon a dreadful storm arose, such as are well known in our seas, and the little band was exposed to all its insane fury. The mistral hissed along the tops of the waves, till they were lashed into one sheet of

foam ; the waves themselves rose up mountains high, and the rudderless boat was driven here and there, like a leaf in the autumn blast.

“ Seeing that they were all now rushing to their end, Lazarus cried out aloud to God, and said, ‘ O Lord, Jesus Christ ! Thou didst raise me once from death itself, and from the cerements of the grave ; wilt Thou not deliver me now, when we are bent only on Thine own errand—to preach Thee to the heathen nations ? ’ And immediately the tossing bark subsided safely into the trough of the waves, and the mountainous waves seething like oil, ran together and went down, and the Hand of God threw a curb over the rising of the great deep. The boat was soon quietly driven on a broad, sandy shore, and the banished ones landed, and knelt down to give thanks to God Who had delivered them from instant death.

“ Then they ascended the river bank, and began to preach and teach the country people to know Christ and to forsake their idols and unclean life ; and so passed through all the villages and hamlets of the Rhone side till they came to Arles—a great and magnificent new-built city, the glory of Lower Gaul, having its baths, and circus, and race-course, and theatres, and a crowded, pleasure-loving, luxurious population. Just as the little band of Christians came into the market-place, exceedingly wicked games and dances were going on, in honour of the lewd pagan idol Venus, whose snow-white statue stood high,

wreathed with roses, before them, with the shameless women dancing about it.

“But when Trophimus saw this dreadful sight, he raised his voice till it rang high above the noise of the viols and the shouts of the applauding throng, and besought the men of Arles to hear what he had to declare, for he could tell them of the one true God, while they were only worshipping devils and evil powers. And as he went on speaking, boldly preaching Christ and showing that He alone was God, the idol shrieked with a loud cry, and fell headlong, breaking in pieces, and rolled down the steps of the theatre. Then arose a mighty cry from the vast multitude, and thousands fell on their knees and asked to be baptized that day in Arles.

“After that great and signal victory, the joyful Apostolic band divided, and took each one the lot appointed and chosen out for him by the Spirit of God. Trophimus remained in the city and became Bishop of Arles, where also he was martyred, shedding his blood for the faith where he had first baptized. Martha with Marcellus went to Tarascon, and converted all that town and neighbourhood by delivering them from a monster; Maximin journeyed southward to Marseilles. The three Marys also taught all the poor among the hills between Marseilles and Arles, and the blessed penitent, Magdalene, took refuge for thirty years in a cave above Aubagne. There, as is well known, her unceasing tears were commemorated by a trickling

stream which sprang up in her cave, where the drops may be heard, falling one by one, at this day.*

"But after Magdalene's long penance of love was ended, the three aged Marys were carried, as by one inspiration, across the Rhone into the wildest region of the Camargue, where they gave up their lives peacefully, and went to receive their crown. But no man knew of their resting-place for many generations, till the good King Réné, of Provence, was warned in a vision of their place of burial. He rose up with all his court, and what bishops and clergy could be gathered together in haste, and they rode on horseback across the wild Camargue, till a light shining above the tangled thicket showed them where the relics lay.

"Then they were reverently gathered into rich shrines and sealed; and this very church in which we are met to honour them was quickly raised, and those very same relics have been lowered once in each year upon all the sick and maimed who are brought to these shrines to be made whole."

The voice ceased, and the whole church seemed to unfold and blossom with stir and moving life, and a dumb inarticulate sound rose up and floated above the people, as when thick woods burst into green life and the hum of insects in spring. But the mass went on its course,

* The cave of St. Mary Magdalene, near Aubagne, is called La Sainte Baume.

and all were hushed into one vast silence, as the priest lifted the sacred Host and chalice, and finished the service. It was scarcely over before a hymn burst, like a flood of light and colour, from the crowd. An old hymn, quaint and strange it was,—partly like a battle song, partly like the wail of Welsh harps mourning for the glories of the time gone by. Every one sang it—the old men with their quavering falsetto, the young men in their rich bass, the women, the boys, the youngest of the children—all were singing with heart and soul, and rocking backwards and forwards as they sang. When the hymn had gone on some time, the Dominican Father and the Curé, with his white hair, came out of the sacristy in surplices and stoles, and went slowly up the winding stairs. Instantly the hymn changed to long, loud cries of “*Grâce ! grâce ! O grandes Saintes, amies de Dieu et nos amies, grâce à nous pêcheurs.*” *

These cries fell into a kind of double chant, swelling louder and louder, till the most powerful organ could not have outsounded this extraordinary human music—the great suffering *Vox Humana* crying aloud to Heaven for mercy and pity.

The priests had opened the upper doors and knelt for some minutes absorbed in prayer. The old Curé’s snow-white head could be seen, bent low, and the tears stood on his cheeks, for he loved his people, and

* “A favour ! a favour ! O great Saints, the friends of God and our friends, show favour to us poor sinners !”

there were some among them, sorely smitten and troubled, for whom he was praying with his whole loving heart.

Then they rose up and began to lower the rich shrines of carved old cypress wood slowly down from the roof by their worn pulleys and chains. As the old crumbling but richly-carved caskets came nearer and nearer within reach, the whole multitude swayed with bent heads or prostrated till the church floor looked like a vast field of some ripening grain blown and furrowed by the wind; while still louder and louder rose the cries from the maimed and their friends, “Grâce! grâce! O grandes Saintes, Saintes Maries, amies de Dieu et nos amies, priez pour nous pauvres pécheurs!” *

Nasmyth had planted himself purposely close to a group of blind men, a lame boy, and a young woman looking like death, whose friends had brought her in a rude litter of twisted canes. During the mass he had watched this poor girl with ashy cheeks attentively, thinking that she would die in the church; and at last, to keep her from fainting or dying outright—for the one seemed as likely as the other—he had given her mother the little brandy-flask he always carried, and had seen her recovered by some drops from it being poured down her throat. This group had been among the most eager watchers for the

* “A favour! a favour! O great Saints, holy Marys, the friends of God and our friends, pray for us poor sinners!”

descent of the shrines, and were nearly the first to grasp them as they came within reach, crying out with the utmost earnestness, “Grâce, O Saintes Maries! nous ne sommes pas dignes, mais grâce à nous pauvres pêcheurs!”

Then Nasmyth saw the start, heard the cry, “Oh mother!” and he saw the girl first sitting on the side of the litter, and then kneeling with her mother’s arm clasped round her, mingling thanksgiving and tears and prayers all in one. He saw the lame boy clasp his hands above his head and throw down his staff, kneeling before the altar as if in ecstasy, beside the man no longer blind, who had once more looked at the face of his child, and was going home with seeing eyes and a thankful heart. There were many, also, he saw in the church who were not cured, and who broke out, after the shrines were drawn up, into bitter weeping and lamentation, lamenting that the “Grâce” had passed them by. Others, also not cured, went further in their passionate disappointment, and uttered blasphemous words, and made indignant remonstrances with the Saints, because they had not granted their prayer, threatening even to break their rosaries and burn their scapulars, and take to more evil ways in revenge.

The Dominican monk and the other priests diligently sought these out, rebuking and reasoning gently with them, and striving to show them that, as long as such conduct as this was possible to them, God,

Who knows all hearts, could never bless them or answer their prayers.

Nasmyth, still feeling as if he were in a dream, took his way home from the church to the old inn, through the swarming streets, now full of the rejoicing and thanksgiving crowd, chatting, laughing, recounting the *prone* to one another, gossiping over the sick, cured, and the uncured, who—poor things!—had to pray for more faith and wait to be cured next time. The evening lights, so red, so purple, so gold-flecked, so altogether marvellous on the Mediterranean shores, were now bathing the old town and the triple-piled church, and the yellow ramparts, with a rainbow-tinted flood of glory. Donkeys and mules were standing about, laden with great sacks and baskets of red and yellow oranges, of the huge fragrant lemons, or rather citrons of that coast, of pomegranates and enormous sweet African melons and gourds, which long latteeen-sailed boats used to bring in to Les Stes. Maries and all the little villages along the coast. Everybody was eating cool oranges and pomegranates to refresh themselves after their many hours in the hot church, and cups and gourds of lemonade, made of real lemons, not trashy drugs, were being handed about. Plenty of cigars and cigarettes, too, were being smoked, whose half-fragrant smell was rather agreeable than otherwise. But there was not the slightest approach to drunkenness, or even wine drinking; no broad loose talk, no least evidence

of any free conduct between the brown, Greek-faced men and the merry laughing girls. The continuous roll of talk, the sound of the human voice, the interchange and playful fire of news and ideas, the catching of a thought almost half-way, and tossing it back, a little altered, like a shuttlecock to its owner—all the characteristics which evidently ran in the very blood of these part Greek, part Saracen, part Gallic southerners, so wrought that talking was the one absolute necessity of their daily lives.

“ And these things I have seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears—my English eyes and my English ears—in the latter half of the nineteenth century,” Nasmyth was saying to himself, as he strolled leisurely towards the inn. “ Who would believe me if I wrote it all down, or if I tried to convey anything of the impression it has made upon me ? All I can say is, that I wish all Great and ‘ Greater ’ Britain could, just for once, turn out and see what I have seen to-day. I think my countrymen would say there were things yet palpable to the senses not so very far from home that are altogether undreamt of in their philosophy.”

CHAPTER XX.

ANNE MORLAND SPEAKS HER MIND.

"OH, I am so glad you are come in, papa!" said Anne Morland. "Here's a letter from Leo, from Paris. What a scribbled direction it is! Do let us hear when he is coming."

"I am very glad," was Mr. Morland's single remark, and he looked really relieved. He hastily opened the envelope, and exclaimed, "They will both be here to-morrow. I am really glad."

"To-morrow! We shall all be at Teddington," observed Car Chetwynd, in a vexed undertone.

"We shall have got back, papa, shall we not?" said Anne. "I will stay at home, shall I?"

"What! Teddington? Why, they will go with us, of course. They get to Boulogne to-night, and cross to-morrow morning at eight o'clock. I shall make them help to row us down."

"Poor Leo! I think I see him!" said Janet, laughing. "He will offer to steer, and sit at the stern,

lazily holding the ropes, and talking in a very low voice, quite worn out with the exertion."

"I don't think he will get so far as that," said Caryl. "Leo always leaves the steering part of the business to Harry. I think Harry will steer and talk all the time too."

"Come, you chattering Jack, now take yourself off to the schoolroom," said their father; "I am going to have a long talk with Anne; and mind, there's no admittance here again, except on the most special business. Car, my dear, would you mind going with Lettice to the South Kensington, to see if she has got her drawing medal? I believe the lists are out by this time."

Car made a curious little *move* behind her tea-cup, which her uncle did not see; but instantly said, "Oh, certainly, uncle; and I suppose we may call for the books at the library as we come back? Did you make out the list, Anne?"

"Yes, dear; it is under the weight, on the writing-table."

Car gracefully glided to the writing-table, took the list from under the square of Pentelican marble, and noiselessly left the room.

"I fear Leo is none the better for my letter to him," said Mr. Morland, when the door had shut. "I am a little sorry now that I said more than that he must come home and talk this ridiculous fancy over with us."

"I did not know you had said anything at all yourself," replied Anne. "Letters are so strong and sharp, when one cannot see the face that speaks."

"Well, we shall have it all out soon, I suppose," said her father. "I am not sorry this party has been made up for to-morrow; it will take off the stiffness. He must exert himself, as we shall not be only ourselves; and it will take off the pain of meeting when there is a conflict of wills. He speaks as if he were determined to have this girl."

"Does he? I am glad," said Anne. "It will prove him to be stronger of purpose than I had thought; and also, I feel as if it would be very unfair on our part to throw her over."

"He never ought to have had anything to throw over," said her father, irritably, recurring to the spilt milk as the easiest bone of contention to pick. "It's altogether a foolish, ruinous business, and I am surprised at your seeming to countenance it, Anne. What on earth are they to live on?"

"Dear father, money is not absolutely *everything*," said Anne, gently. "Suppose Leo convinces you that his love is unchangeable, and that it will be the making of him in his profession?"

"Aye, aye; easy talking! Unchangeable? I'll venture to say our little Car could soon bring him to a changed mind—just wind him round her finger, in fact. It is really too provoking to see her beauty and grace and all her belongings passed over and missed in this

way, to make a mess of a marriage with a girl who could only come among us like some black swan or duck-billed platypus from the antipodes!"

Anne saw that much dust had been again thrown in her father's eyes, and that he had quite forgotten what she had expressed on this subject before. She gently, but firmly, said, "I could *never* be glad that Leo should marry Car, father dear. I think you do not quite see her character."

"*Quite see* her character! Absurd! My own niece? Why, the child has grown up with us all! Anne, you are not like yourself about all this. You are quite hard upon your poor cousin. Surely, surely, my own love, you could not feel jealous about her, eh? Her beauty, and all that, eh?"

"My dearest father! No, I am thankful to say I never had any feelings about Car's beauty, except to be glad of it," replied Anne, smiling. "But I do feel—still—that she somehow gets round you—gets between me and you. She is not straightforward; that's the truth."

"Eh? Well, she does not quite go in the fearless, downright path you do, my love—straight as a line from north to south, with a mind as clear and transparent as glass. You and your mother never had a single thing to hide, or a difficulty about the truth and open daylight. But, there! women like that are not to be met with every day, I can tell you. And then, there are other advantages which must be secured as

long as we live in this world, my dear. I dare say I seem to you worldly and outside, and without a high standard, and so on ; but after all, we must walk on the dry ground, and not float about in the clouds. I don't see much amiss with poor little Car ; I am sure she is most willing to run here and there, and to do any sort of kindness to everybody. She is always as busy as a bee, and usefully occupied : and then she has all those pretty, soft, womanly ways that are so nice in a man's house. She would make his home very pretty and pleasant, and draw friends about him, and know how to urge him on, and keep him to his work, and to manage all that in London. Society would be Chinese hieroglyphics to this little French farmer's daughter."

"I suppose a 'farmer' in Provence is very unlike our own farmer class ?" said Anne. "And then you see —you must not think me obstinate, father dear, but, you see, Leo has *engaged* himself to this little girl. We must behave as rightly to farmers' daughters as duchesses, must we not ?"

" You are right there, dearie ; you have hit the very blot in the principle of rectitude. Well, well ! To-morrow will bring forth many things. Leo must tell his whole story, and of course he shall have fair play ; so now, are all the 'vivers' ready ? Is everything prepared so as to run smooth to-morrow ? You know I can't abide failures, and hitches, and shortcomings. I would much rather stay at home altogether."

Well did Anne know this. Well had she been

grounded in the experience that men generally *do* detest any bar to their own perfect enjoyment, though they may not have lifted a single finger towards the work of organization, and toil of preparation, that was needed. She smiled gaily back at her father, for with Anne, as with all true women, her sunny lovingness swallowed up and drowned all bitterness of the knowledge of evil. She only assured him that everything would be securely packed, and that she should see all the items laid out herself in the kitchen before they were consigned to the hampers. Then she kissed his forehead, and left him to the untroubled, delightful toil of filling in his figure of Elaine.

* * * * *

The boats glided swiftly down the river, and the river was in its ripest fulness of beauty. “Needs not be said” that “the river” was the royal Thames, up whose stream the boats were making their way to the velvet lawns, where they had leave to land and dine. The August cloudless blue, the vivid greens, the distant purples, all touched with impalpable haze of heat, and wonderful, electric colour and light; the blaze of gardens in their fulness of prime, the piles of geraniums, calceolarias, and verbenas, actually emitting flashes of light; the fragrance of mignonette, heliotrope, and jasmine, in which the world seemed to be steeped; the late water-lilies, and golden flags, and spiky loosestrife; the clear, dark swirl of the queen of rivers, as its waters ran leisurely, and with a kind of sweeping,

highbred calm, below the woods and parks that bordered it with ever-fresh beauty—these things were all there in their perfection of enjoyment, such as only the frequenters of the Thames can truly know. And those only can also appreciate the swift gliding of the well-manned four-oars, the calm, tranquil, yet sufficient speed, exciting the most pleasurable sense of mingled repose and movement, which is so unlike the fierce, throbbing, feverish pulse of the racing eight-oar, with its bound and pant like a battle cry. The boats were filled with a pleasant party, but Nasmyth and Leopold were not among them. The others had all waited half-an-hour for them, and then Anne had written a most urgent note to be given on their arrival, telling them to follow them, and giving the time and plan of encampment and dinner. The tiny steamboat which had been chartered of a friendly club, some of whose members were present, to bring up the servants, provisions, and dining accessories, had been ordered to lie back for them.

The aristocratic boats had nearly reached their goal, when the small puffing creature, like some miniature monster of prey, was seen turning the corner of the reach, and lively opinions and bets were merrily bandied to and fro as to whether the travellers were on board. The landing of the four-oars was effected in the midst of this excitement, which reached its climax when the tiny steamer puffed round to back along-shore, and two tall figures were seen lifting their

hats to the gay group now gathered on the river-bank.

“There they are ! there are Leo and Harry ! they are come !” which multitudinous exclamations blossomed out, no one knows how, into three hearty, merry cheers, startling the fishes and the fishermen and fisherwomen far down in the river bend, who were sitting sleepily in a vast punt under the magnificent overhanging woods.

They have landed ; they are actually here. The tall fair-bearded, sleepy-eyed Leopold is instantly wreathed and garlanded with pretty well-dressed sisters ; the broader, bluffer, darker Harry is grasped by Mr. Morland’s outstretched hand. The greetings of the men were of course made in stereotyped reticent English fashion.

“Well, Leo, welcome home ! how are you, my boy ?” said his father.

“Thank you, father, I am glad to be at home again. How well you look !”

“Here is some one you have not spoken to yet, Leo. Take care, Lettice. You don’t give your brother a chance.”

Leopold had not spoken to Car, it is true. How could he have done so with a kind of a “woodbine, eglantine, and vine” of sisters trailing all round and about him ? But he had seen her all the time, and also perceived that she had looked at nothing but him. He shook hands with her now, and Car, after one vivid, shy

look up at him, blushed, or seemed to blush, and her thick-fringed eyelids fell. She withdrew her hand quickly, and after a little while took herself away also. She had shot her arrow with steadfast audacity into the oak, hoping to find it by-and-by sticking, with its barbed point, "in the heart of a friend."

Nasmyth, meanwhile, had seized upon Anne, and, walking with her a little apart, was telling her about Noël Privas, and of his earnest hopes that her father would entertain the idea of a Provençal daughter-in-law. He spoke so warmly in her favour, and urged her marriage with Leopold so strongly, that Anne looked at him wonderingly. She, with all her English rectitude and love of justice, was still unable to free herself from the circle within which English people so narrowly imprison themselves : and a foreign sister, of a strange, suspicious religion, had seemed to her something of a calamity, though one which she thought they were now bound in honour to face. But here came Nasmyth, talking about Noël as if she were actually a prize to be eagerly grasped at for Leo's sake.

"Then you really think she would be a great acquisition to us all ?" she said, walking quietly on, in her pretty, *bouffonne* blue-and-white muslin, and shady muslin hat crowned with green leaves and trailing hops.

"I do indeed think so," said Nasmyth, his thoughts suddenly taking a great leap back to Les Stes. Maries, and the solemn, serious, strangely-real world of thought in which he had been living. "I think, if you knew

Noël, Miss Morland, and took in, as you would, her truth, her singleness, her pure, deep, loving character, you would feel as I do, that such a woman as that is a real pearl, a jewel to be bought at any costly price. I think Leo would be most fortunate in winning such a wife."

"I am very glad to hear all you have told me," said Anne, looking at him with her earnest, truthful eyes, full of gratitude; "and I thank you for telling me. You know how anxious I—we all, I mean—are about Leo; but you do not know how terribly afraid I have been—perhaps with a cowardly fear—that this has been just one more scrape. Certainly, papa has felt it to be, and has been much cast down about it. I see he is very nervous to-day, and would like not to open the subject till he can have it all out with Leo alone. But I should like you to-night just to speak to him and tell him what you have been saying to me. Noel! What a pretty strange name for our sister! I feel as if I loved her already."

"You would, Miss Morland, you will; she is so *true*," replied Nasmyth hurriedly, and his low deep voice was moved, for he felt as if he were betraying all his feelings to Anne without any preparation or knowing the least how they would be received. They were stopped by Caryl, who came racing after them to say that his father thought they had better have luncheon now, before they wandered about any more. Anne blushed, for luncheon and all its responsi-

bilities had vanished as if they had no place in life, and she now hurried away to arrange with Janet and the inevitable Stone where the cloths were to be spread, and how everybody was to be seated. The large summerhouse, it was found, would hold the greater number, and there were tables and benches to be had from the lodge, with cups and saucers, kettles, water, and all the other impedimenta which even picnic lovers must endure to be cumbered with.

When they were all seated, Car Chetwynd was found to be missing, and Caryl was just going to rush off in search of her, when Leopold laid a detaining hand on his shoulder, and said, "I will go for her, Caryl, boy: I saw which way she went—towards the water-lilies. You stay and help with the tea, old man," and he ran off in a slanting direction towards the river.

When he was on the river-bank, Leopold looked up and down the stream, and saw, some little way higher up, a skiff, which had been moored to a willow stump when they landed, lying in a bed of lilies, and Car sitting in it, with her head buried in the red cushions at the stern. He called to her softly, and ran along the bank till he was opposite the skiff. Still Car did not move, and Leo then called rather louder, and threw a stone gently splashing into the bed of water-lilies. With a start, Car then sat up, so suddenly, that the skiff was in imminent danger of wobbling over.

"Oh, do take care!" cried Leopold, in a fright.

"I beg your pardon for startling you; but they are all at dinner, and every one is asking where you are."

"Tiresome! How awkward and stupid!" murmured Car, putting up both hands to her beautiful rippling hair, from which her bird's-nest of a hat had fallen. Leopold then saw that she had been crying, or—Heaven save the mark!—*seemed* to have been crying many tears, of which her large, thick-fringed eyelids also *seemed* to be full.

"Dearest Car, what *is* the matter? You are not happy—not the least like yourself. What is it, dear Car? Come, you used often to tell me your troubles." So spoke Leopold, holding on to the willow stump over the water.

"*Used!*!" said Car, covering her eyes with both little hands, and shaking her shoulders with the prettiest movement of a child's fractiousness. "What signifies *used*, when everything——"

"Everything is what?" said Leo, striving to get hold of the skiff with a boat-hook he picked up on the bank. "Do come back to the shore and common sense, Car. Will you throw me out that line, to draw you in by? They will all be here in a band directly, to see whether you have developed into that damp unpleasant body."

"Oh! defend me!" said Car, roused out of her tear-concocting and high sentiment. "Yes, I will come, though I am sure I might just as well overturn the boat and get drowned at once. Who would care?

What would it matter, if you would—but just leave me alone and let it happen?"

"Let it happen! Why, you must be a little astray in your head to say such outrageous things. Who would care? Why—of course—how *can* you say such horrid things, Car? Look here, we can't go on talking now; but will you slope away after dinner, and I'll row you down under the beech woods? Will you? Come, say yes, and do please throw me that line in the boat there behind you."

Car seemed to take for granted that "yes" was a needless word to use on such a question, thinking, perhaps, that the sudden brightening of her face with the loveliest dawn of a smile might be so construed. She twisted herself round, however, and with one swift, deft movement, grasped and threw the rope, which Leopold caught, and drawing the skiff swiftly in, landed his cousin, and made the boat fast to its former mooring. Probably it was by a pure accident that Car's foot gave way as she left the skiff, so that Leopold's arm was thrown instantly round her to lift her out on shore.

Ah! Noël, as you stood in your pure, single, high-souled love, under the old fretted church porch, at Aigues Mortes, did any shadow of this "false Isolte" fall on you with a death-like chill? Did any icy revealing freeze your heart as to what a man's love can be?

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WILES OF THE FALSE ISOLTE.

IT was very pleasant under the arching branches of the great oaks, while chickens, and cold lamb, and cool salads, and refreshing drinks, made the round of the tables, and vanished in a wholesale way. As this is not at all a fashionable story, nor has a single duke or duchess in it, no special knowledge of cookery has been got up, nor must any one expect to hear of curious wines. Nothing had been got from Gunter's, and there was neither Clos Vougeot nor Clicquot champagne. They were all only simple-hearted, respectable people—while I write this, I have a painful demur about Car—and the picnic, so called—for it was not a real one—was like the parties which used to be made, out of the simplest elements, from old, long-established, deep-rooted country houses. By which, I mean the real homes of old country gentry; not the big hotels in noblemen's big parks, where the shutters are opened and the curtains unbolstered towards September for six weeks or a couple of months' London dissipation.

Mr. Morland's friends and intimates were mostly artists or literary people of some kind—writers, poets, painters, art-critics, and a few people who loved art in any shape, and lived among its workmen. Probably there is no society where the “feast” and “flow,” so often quoted, are so richly to be enjoyed; because there is also a thorough free-masonry, and the escape from conventional distinctions and stiffness. Painters, as a rule, too, have not the irritability of brain and sensitive jealousy which music seems to engender, and there is about them more *laissez aller* and repose. After dinner, some one began to hum “Celia's Arbour,” which was exquisitely taken up by Leo's tenor and Nasmyth's deep baritone, so much finer than any bass. Then one or two others took up “Who will o'er the downs,” and a few other really good, flowing part-songs, in which Anne and Janet, who had good well-trained voices, were called into requisition, and even Lettice and Caryl, with their sweet childish sopranos, made, as it were, the pinnacle of the spire. The cows, always attracted by music, gathered round, and much mirth was excited, when, after a few good part-songs, the singers found a semicircle of red and white cows standing round, as in the front seats. Leopold pointed them out to Juan, whose low growl and fidgets had been hitherto under the perfect control of a thoroughbred dog-gentleman, and Ju soon put the audience to rout, coming back shaking his queer tail, and twisting himself into a half-moon, with much exultation.

When the little breeze of movement and laughter had subsided, some of the singers' seats were found to be empty, and Anne, Car Chetwynd, Nasmyth, and Leopold were missing. The younger ones then broke up into groups for croquet, for which Mr. Leybourne, the painter, had offered a pretty brooch as a prize to the best lady player. A sweepstake was then laughingly set on foot for a little silver mallet for the "best man ;" and these preliminaries being settled, the players marched up to the ground near the house in a gay stream, leaving the servants and helpers to their dinner and the undisturbed repacking of the baskets. There were some good paintings in the house, which some of the elders wished to see, and the whole river-bank was therefore quite deserted by the party for some hours. Tea and coffee were to be served rather late, and there was to be a supper for all who would go, given by Mr. Leybourne, whose large, airy, old-fashioned rooms were somewhere near the Chelsea river-bank.

It had happened, without any arrangement of their own, that Nasmyth had taken Anne down the stream to show her a great patch of flags and beautiful flowering river grasses, frequented by dragon flies, while Leopold and Car had loitered down, according to their agreement, to the skiff moored in the opposite direction. It seemed, as if with intuitive shame, Leopold avoided, just then, meeting any one's eyes, and had, under this feeling, taken a rather circuitous

route to the river. While Car was widely, eagerly awake, under her veiled glances and downcast eyelids, Leopold seemed to be acting under some powerful mesmeric influence, sleepily half-conscious, and as it were with only one side of his will active. Car was steering with the nicest hand upon the tiller-ropes, scanning the least obstacles to her path; while Leopold was drifting along, not quite voluntarily leaving his hold of principle and self-control and purpose, but rather allowing the current to carry him away. Car's foot did not slip or fail her now, she deftly and lightly poised herself like a bird, while Leopold held the fairy boat in a firm grasp, and slipped into her place as if she were in truth the Lady of Shalott. Leopold got in behind the long, slender oars, and a few of his practised strokes took them far and fast into the stream and down towards the reach. He seemed to put all his will into those first strokes, as if to get away from Car, and every one of the party, and even from himself. But when they came under the shadow of those glorious woods, where the shade, and stillness, and beauty seemed all more lovely and mysterious in their inner reflection than their outward reality, Leopold dropped his vigour, and only dipping his slim oars noiselessly into the water, just kept the cockle-shell moving along the glassy surface.

The picture he saw in it was a live Calderon. Car just held the white tiller-cords with one hand, while she trailed the other lightly in the water, now sprink-

ling a few drops in the air, now listlessly catching at a reed or floating lily-bud. Her white muslin gipsy hat, with a crown of dog-roses and their scarlet berries, lit up, while it seemed to shade, her face, and her thick, white piqué dress was also relieved by the bright mingled Eastern colours of her soft Algerine sash. The lights and shadows shimmered over the coils and loops of her abundant bronzed hair; and as she carelessly played with the water, her eyes seemed to take every expression by turns that was soft, languid, appealing, and pathetic. This was the figure, leaning on its red cushions, that was looking Leopold in the face. As he gazed at it, he seemed to be drinking in, through his eyes, some witch-draught which benumbed his memory, paralyzed his will, and made even his arms nerveless and weak.

“Car!” he said at last, letting the boat gently drift into a bed of reeds and lilies under the bank.

“What did you say?” she almost whispered in reply.

“I have said nothing at all yet. I am going to say now—what made you so unhappy before dinner?”

“That is my concern,” Car rather haughtily answered.
“It is nothing to you at all.”

“Is it nothing *about* me? I mean nothing that I have to do with? If it is, Car, let me alter it.”

“There is nothing to alter,” she answered quickly; then, almost in a whisper again, “Nothing *now*.”

“Why not *now*? Have I done anything that you wish to have undone? If so——”

"If so?" repeated Car, sitting upright and fixing her wonderful eyes upon him. "If so—what?"

"I should undo it," replied Leopold, as if in a dream.

"Undo your——? What nonsense we are both of us talking! You are going away into fairyland to be married, and to leave us all behind; and, of course, you will be so happy that you will forget all about the old time. Why, you must have almost forgotten it already. So your Provençale is very beautiful, Leo? Do tell me about her, will you? What is she like? Is that *really* her face in your Jeanne d'Are?"

"Yes," replied Leopold, absently. "Do you know that my father objects to my marriage, Car?"

"Does he? That is very unfortunate. But I dare say as soon as you are married your wife will bring him round, especially if she is so charming and lovely. Of course she will be at a disadvantage at first, not speaking English, and knowing nothing of our home ways. But I suppose—I suppose—oh! I don't know anything—any more!" and, to Leopold's utter dismay, Car threw herself back upon the cushions, covering her face with her hands, sobbing as if her heart was broken with grief.

He backed the skiff away from the reeds and shore, and rowed into the middle of the stream, and farther away from wood-paths and possible listeners, and by that time Car had thought fit to recover her composure, and was only looking very pale and downcast, and exquisitely bewitching in her quiet shamefaced misery.

Leopold felt quite desperate as he looked at her; and although love-confessions from a woman were not to his taste, yet this one was for him, and the lowering was therefore forgiven. It is a bad case when such forgiveness has to be accorded between a man and woman, for each will revenge upon the other, consciously or unconsciously, the sense of degradation. Car was not a woman, either, to bear humiliation well, even when self-inflicted. Somebody must be sharply punished for her pain, and it was now Leopold's turn.

"Stop now," she said, with imperious temper in her silvery tones, "I do not wish to be rowed any further. I cannot imagine why we came."

"I will tell you why. That we might understand one another," replied Leopold, struggling, but vainly, in the net.

"There is very little to understand," retorted Car. "Men are all alike, and they try to make fools of every one in turn. It is well to know it."

"Car, I think now you are not just. You never would answer me clearly before I went abroad, and I thought you did not care for me."

"You thought! Pray, when did you think so? When we were riding in Epping Forest, did you think so? When we rowed down to Hampton Court, did you think so? When we were in the conservatory at Mr. Leybourne's ball, did you think so? It is unmanly—no, I mean it is most fitting and manlike—to shift the blame upon my shoulders. If you meant me to under-

stand, what was clear enough to any but the wilfully blind, you should have spoken more clearly still; if you meant nothing, Leopold Morland, you were a base humbug. But it is all over now—‘Too late! Too late!’ nothing signifies now, and it is only idiotic to talk of it. Row me back to the others now, if you please.”

“It is not too late, and it is *not* idiotic to talk of it,” replied Leopold. “I can speak to my father to-night.”

“Yes, in the same breath as you make the arrangements for your French wife! Thank you! you have chosen your own lot now, and you must abide by it. I should think you were quite used to eating olives by this time. No, no! that would be rather too ridiculous. But there is one thing I *should* like to do just once more—if you will row up the stream now, I shall also be obliged to you. I should like to have just one more gallop with you before you go into fairy-land, and then I shall bid you God speed. Let it be one day soon; the beginning of next week? Thank you, that is good of you. There they all are, waving their croquet mallets at us—tea, I suppose. Thank you, I can get out perfectly well by myself.”

“Where *have* you been?” said Caryl, running down breathless to the river edge. “We have looked everywhere for you. Tea is ready, and there is such jolly coloured ice, Car. I have made Stone keep a lot for you.”

"Thank you, old man ; that is very good of you. In return for Westminster Abbey, I suppose ?"

"Where *have* you been ?" echoed Lettice, running down the lawn. "Father wanted Leo *ever* so much, and we have been all about the greenhouses and fern-houses to look for you ; I should have thought you would have enough of the river going home."

"Never can have enough of the Thames, Lettice," said Car, lightly ; "I have been hearing ever such a pretty fairy tale, and very soon you will both see the genuine, original fairy, that was forgotten at all the christenings."

"Then I hope she won't be as angry as some of them were," exclaimed Caryl. "Why, they were the most horrid, cantankerous old parties that ever were known, and generally did something very upside down to everybody !"

"This one will only begin by making things upside down," said Car, maliciously enjoying herself. "After that, everything will become as straight as the school-room ruler, and then you will, both of you, instantly find yourselves ruled all over with strong black lines."

"What nonsense ! I don't believe a word of it," said practical, open-eyed Lettice ; "but do come and have some tea, at least."

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW LEOPOLD CONDUCTED HIMSELF.

GREAT was Mr. Morland's astonishment and almost dismay, after winding himself up to the higher atmosphere of Anne's rectitude and Nasmyth's plain bluntly-expounded level of what were the right principles upon which to act, to find Leopold, on the morrow, more vacillating and uncertain than he had ever yet known him, about his own wishes. When no longer under the immediate personal spell of the false Isolte, he was depressed, irritable, nerveless, and utterly wretched. Whenever Car was present he became madly excited, and rattled on with her as if he had not a thought or responsibility in the world. Anne could do nothing with him ; and when, after a long rambling, partly excited and partly dejected conversation with her, she, in her honest integrity, could not refrain from letting him see her amazed contempt at his conduct. Leopold had burst into a fit of excited passion, such as she had never yet known in him, and had flung himself away from her, saying that he

should leave the country at once, and never come home any more.

Bewildered and miserable, Anne met with Nasmyth in the hall, and besought him to go after Leopold and bring him to reason, promising on her part never to speak to him on the subject again.

Nasmyth hurried away to do her errand, but no trace of Leopold was to be found. His hat was gone, but as Nasmyth was at a total loss to know in what direction to seek him, there was little to be done. As he was returning from a fruitless quest up and down the neighbouring streets and in the Square gardens, he met Anne at the hall door, who said,

“ I was just coming to look for you to say that Car is missing too ; and as she has not gone out with any of the others, I imagine she and Leo are somewhere together.”

“ Is it possible there can be a woman in the world like that ? ” exclaimed Nasmyth, unable to control his indignant contempt. “ Well, anyhow, it is better than for Leo to get into one of his wild moods alone, for then he scarcely knows what he is doing. After all, Anne, it might be worse.”

“ Might it ? ” said Anne, much grieved, and no longer able to keep the heavy tears from rolling down her cheeks.

“ Do come in and sit down,” said Nasmyth, gently leading her towards the drawing-room, which was cool, fresh with flowers, and happily empty.

"There now, sit down in this nice resting chair, and I will give you a footstool. Here's a fan."

He then quietly quested about till he had also found an old Venice glass smelling-bottle full of Eau de Cologne, which he brought to her and poured some of it on her handkerchief. All which little offices the big strong man did as gently as a woman.

"Oh, thank you; that is very nice. It has done me a great deal of good," Anne said; "but you were going to say something just when I could not help being stupid?"

"I was saying, I think," said Nasmyth, slowly following back his train of thought, "that things might have been much worse than they are. I do not mean to say that they are not bad, now, or that Leo is not doing very wrong. I could not say that, for it would not be honest or true. I am cruelly cut up about it myself, because, when I found in the Camargue that he was so really fond of Noël Privas, I did encourage him all I could to stick to marrying her, and all that; though, if I had known of it beforehand, I should have gone down on my knees to him not to engage himself or entangle her till he had seen you and your father. But I really did hope then that she had strengthened him against that dreadful fickleness which has hitherto been the bane of his life. Still, you see, if it is not so, and if he is as like a sand-rope as ever in his purposes, and his principles all go to smash in this way, at the least extra temptation of a woman's

face, it is better for him not to marry Noël, for the heart-break would be much worse and more wicked after marriage than now. So don't you be too much cut up about it, for perhaps Car—Miss Chetwynd—will be the best able to hold him in hand. And, by Jove!" ended Nasmyth, after the longest speech he had ever been known to make in his life—"by Jove! I do hope he'll catch a Tartar!"

Anne could not help smiling at the honest, honourable indignation of this great sheep-dog man, so strong and so gentle, so ready to fight all shams and shames to the death, while tenderer than a mother to anything feeble or wronged.

"That's right! Now you look like yourself," he said. "I can't think what would become of us all if you were to turn Feeble-mind! And now, Anne, I want you to give me one word of answer about—for my own concerns—or, if you don't like to speak, just put out your hand instead. Will you—do you think you can ever—be my wife?"

Another time Anne might perhaps have felt that she should have preferred a less bald and commonplace mode of wooing. She might even have liked to linger over the between-time and the delight of becoming more and more certain of his real affection, without being forced to come to a spoken decision. But at this moment it was so refreshing to rest on, and feel the prop of this strong, firm, reliable support, and to know that all the help he could give was law-

fully her own, that she simply did what he asked. Or, rather, she did both things. She frankly held out her hand to Nasmyth, and said, in her mixed surprise and gladness, "Yes; some time or other. But, oh, I am not half good enough!"

"That's my affair," said Nasmyth, laughing a little, and clasping the hand strongly in both his own. "And 'some time or other' won't suit me at all."

"Speak to my father, Harry," Anne whispered in his ear, as she was resting her strong head upon the stronger shoulder, henceforward to be her support. "I do not know how I can ever leave him!"

"I dare say! With Janet to take your place directly, and Lettice coming on! But don't you be afraid, dearest," he added tenderly; "it shall all be done in the right way; and, do you know, I think—though it is hard to go just at this moment—that I ought to tell him now at once."

Anne glanced at the clock on the chimneypiece, and starting up, said, "Is it so late? Yes, Harry, go now, and ask him to let me come as soon as you have done talking to him."

* * * * *

Leopold had flung away from Anne in a frenzy of passion, excited by a variety of causes in which the consciousness of his own baseness and his self-contempt had wrought the most strongly. He struggled, but feebly, to free himself from the net Car had cast around him, and from the spell of her bewildering and

paralyzing enchantment. He strove to reassure himself that it was Noël whom he really loved, Noël whom he desired to be his wife. He even, at times, shuddered at the thought of Car's reckless want of principle and consummate craft, and felt convinced that such a woman could never make him happy, or inspire him with trust. If she could so act, knowing him to be an engaged man, so put herself forward to blind him with the lust of the eye, so heartlessly lure him with bold attraction from the woman he had promised to marry—how could he feel confidence in her ever after as a wife? Would he ever feel sure that he knew whom she had seen, with whom she had been holding intercourse, where she had gone, or what she was doing? Sweet, flattering, wily falsehoods flowed from her exquisite lips like trickling streams of water; and at the very moment she was lying to him her glorious eyes were fixed upon him with the wide-open, fearless, cloudlessly innocent expression of a child. She toyed and dallied with every principle, casting it from her as she had cast away the reed tops and lily buds yesterday out of the boat; as if truth and uprightness, and justice and honour, were but weeds of the field or flood, to be now and then caught up or snatched at, and then flung regardlessly aside. How could any man, not besotted in his folly, wish to make such a woman his wife?

And Leopold was not quite a fool. He was that worse thing—a man infirm of purpose and principle.

He had rushed from Anne's presence into a little back morning-room, where there was a small fernery, first put up to blind some overlooking windows, and afterwards become a much petted and cared-for possession of Janet's, under whose special charge it was. And in that fernery he saw Car standing, watering the delicate new fronds of an Osmunda with Caryl's watering-pot. She started on seeing Leopold's face, and hastily setting down the watering-pot she flew to him. "What is it? What has happened? Oh, *please* don't look so dreadful, Leo!"

"I may well look 'dreadful.' Much obliged for the adjective! I am just going down to St. Catherine's Docks to find a ship bound for New Zealand or Australia. I shall bid good-bye to England now for evermore."

"Oh, Leo! Leo! don't say such horrid things. Ah! I know what it is. Your father and Anne have been torturing you. Anne is so cold: she has no heart whatever."

"That's not true, Car; I wish I were half—no, half-a-quarter—as good as Anne. But I am not good, and I can't go on living here in this misery—torn to pieces. Good-bye!"

Car saw that it was no moment for asking explanations, or for the least touch of teasing. She did not once even mention his marriage, but said, as if it had just occurred to her, "Leo, I'll tell you what would be the best plan. Let us go out and take a quiet ride, if

you will just go to Hammersley's, and order two nice horses. I should like Sultan for me, please, with the side-saddle I always have, and let us go to Roehampton, or Mortlake, out of everybody's way. I will just leave a line to uncle, to say we are gone. Will you? And order the horses for me, please."

" My own sweet little Car, that's a capital idea! Go and put on your habit, and I'll come back and wait for you here. To get away from everybody is just what will save me at this moment from going mad!"

Leopold caught up his hat and rushed off; and Car gently, but swiftly, ran upstairs, smiling to herself as she went. " After all, how strangely things weave into the pattern one has always intended to be the pattern of one's life," she was thinking, as she undressed and dressed in her cool chamber with the deftest quickness, everything turning the right way, and just as she wanted it, in her skilful little hands. " Other people may come clumsily or fiercely across one's woof, and break all one's threads, and tangle them fearfully for a while. But if the weaver be patient and of good heart, and have a firm purpose, all that tangle can be smoothed out again, and the threads fastened, and the web finished triumphantly after all!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RIDE TO ROEHAMPTON.

NOTHING was said of the least importance on either side, while Car and Leopold took their way towards Roehampton. She seemed to make it her point to divert him altogether from serious thoughts, and only kept up a moderate and very pleasant sprinkle of the lightest talk—what and whom they had seen during the winter; what pictures had been “cast” at the Academy, and why; all kinds of anecdotes of their own circle of artists and their friends; everything told with the slight flavour, colouring, and zest which was peculiar to the syren-character of the girl, poised with the most perfect ease, but as square and firm in the saddle as any practised woman-rider to hounds in Leicestershire, her little gauntleted hand showing its perfect power and practice over the mouth of the half-bred blue Arab she rode.

Car alternately put her horse to a brisk gallop, a slow trot, or lounged along the lanes at Leopold’s side, and in each mood and pace looked prettier and more *aguçante* than in the one before. They got over

Barnes Common at a good pace, and turning up the long lane which skirts the Sacred Heart Convent and Roehampton Park, came out on the pretty ground lying between Rochampton and Richmond. Before they left the village, Leopold bought, of a clean old woman, a loaf and some ginger beer—the only eatables which they could find that were possible to swallow, and they cantered on to a lovely solitary dip in the turf grass, sheltered by gorse, ferns, and a thick brushwood of trees. Here they dismounted, Leopold fastened their horses to a couple of stout tree branches, and they sat down on the grass to eat the moderate cates they had been able to secure. The ride and the repose of it had done Leopold so much good, that he easily demolished three-quarters of the loaf; and Car's feelings never hindered her from picking up a very good meal on any kind of wholesome food, for, like all women of her special characteristics, her organization and health were faultlessly sound.

When she had finished the last morsel of bread, and rolled up the paper into a ball to throw at Leopold, she suddenly bent her lovely eyes upon him with a new, grave, and serious expression, and said, "Now, Leo, you must decide what you are going to do."

"Eh? About what, all of a sudden?"

"About your marriage."

"I thought we were to let that alone, just for to-day," he replied, cloudily.

"Just for the *ride*. We have let it alone, and have had the ride, and a very jolly one it has been. But that is over now, and I wish to know one or two things."

"What, to begin with?" said Leopold, who had galloped himself into a reckless, dare-devil mood, and was in no humour to come out of it just yet.

"First, I wish to know if this is the last—the very last jolly ride I shall ever have with you?"

"The devil! No!" exclaimed Leopold, so fiercely as to make him disregard all his usual observance towards women.

Car's face did not express the least shock or concern. She was sitting nearly upright, with her back against the smooth bole of a beech-tree, and her glorious eyes, liquid with light, were fixed upon the far-off sunny hills. Her habit fell gracefully round her in a flood; but much as there was of it, one little booted, arched foot lay just outside the cloth torrent. Through the foliage the flecks of golden light danced upon her thick coils and plaits of bronzed hair, a little rougher and more rippled than usual from the ride. Her feathered hat—Car never would wear a chimney-pot—lay on the ground, with her gloves and whip. After Leopold's answer came a pause. Car still looked at the sunny hills, and a storm-thrush in a thicket sang out his wild pathetic song.

"If you are going to New Zealand or Australia, it probably *will* be our last ride together," she said at

length, with another manner, a little careless and mocking. "I think you must give *that* notion up, Leo. You are likely to be famous now with your pictures, and your new 'grey lights.' There is nothing to hinder you, I think, from being at the very top of the tree, if you will make up your mind now on one or two points."

"As for instance?"

"To stay in England."

"Number one. Item?"

"To stick to your work, and to make a firm, fast friend of your father."

"Number two. The third item is always *the* one?"

"The third is certainly the difficulty in your case," replied Car, and her silvery tones dropped more slowly, but with perfect clearness, on the ear. "You must give up your marriage with Noël Privas."

There was a dead silence. The sun-flecks danced upon Car's head, now a little bowed, but the storm-thrush had ceased his song.

Leopold sat up from the grass on which he had stretched himself at full length, and fixed his eyes full upon Car. Something in her drooped head, her drooped hands, her large thick-fringed eyelids, again bound him fast in her spells. He bent forward, took one of her hands, and almost in a whisper said, "Car!"

"Leo!"

"Look up at me, Car!"

But she did not look up. On the contrary, her head bent a little lower than before.

"Car, you *must* look at me! Do you love me? Will you be my wife?"

"I will, as soon as you are free."

"Then I will be free this night!"

Car lifted up her head, and as her exquisite eyes were fixed full upon his, Leopold took her in his arms, and kissed her, and said she should make of him and of his life henceforth whatever she would.

And Car, in her wild, trembling transport of triumphant joy, forgot to think what manner of love a man's love is.

They rode back to the late dinner in Montagu Square; and when Car had been taken off her horse, she went straight into the study adjoining the painting-room, where her uncle generally smoked a cigarette after his walk.

"So, Miss Runaway, you have got back, have you? What have you done with Leo?"

Car made a loop of her riding-whip, and put it round her uncle's neck, and then, laying her cheek gently on his hair, said, "I have taken him for my own, uncle, for good and all! I am going to look after him now. He has given up his Provençal love, and is going to write to her to-night."

"Well, upon my word, you have both of you behaved so badly, that I don't know how you ought not to be punished! As far as you are concerned, my

darling, I am only joking, as you know very well there is no one in the world I have wished Leo to marry so much as yourself, Car, and it has been a sore trial to me to see my wishes thwarted. But all's well that ends well, and I do hope that poor little French girl won't break her heart about him."

"Leo thinks she will be a nun," replied Car, modulating her voice to its most pathetic tone. "And she seem to be—oh, so good!"

"And what are you, you little deluding baggage? I believe you've always had a soft spot in your little heart for Leo, eh? Come, let us have a full and true confession, Miss!"

"I dare say, without a father confessor!" saucily replied Car. "But now, you dear uncle, seriously, *will* you be very, *very* kind to dear Leo, and pet him up a great deal? Indeed, he wants a good many sugar-plums, for I think—I am afraid that Anne was not very kind to him this morning, and he felt it very much."

"Pooh! pooh! Anne not kind! why, she never was unkind to a living thing!" exclaimed Mr. Morland hastily. "Don't you go and fancy things like that, Car, to make dissension and ill-blood. I'll speak to Leo after dinner, and to Anne too. I say, look at the clock, pussy-cat, and run and get off your things. Five minutes to make yourself ship-shape for dinner, and Leybourne dines here to-night! But, here! I must have one good kiss, first, all the same."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"HE COMETH NOT, SHE SAID."

THE great August heat, which amounts to what may be called white heat on the southern shores of Lower Languedoc and Provence, was now pouring its full fierceness upon Aigues Mortes. The yellowing stone of the fortified walls and towers glowed in the sun with a more lurid glare ; the silent streets were more stifling and desolate than ever, for not a creature dared venture out of doors in the daylight, except the wandering beggars, the gipsies of the Camargue, who were to be found plying their various small trades for the convenience of the town. They were to be found, also, curled up asleep in many a nook and deep doorway, looking, with their brown limbs, fine muscles, and richly-coloured rags, like mediaeval bronzes or painted casts. Here and there, in some of the by-nooks and little weed-grown squares, some old broken fountain would give forth its refreshing sound of splash and trickle, which was nearly the only sound to be heard,

till, late in the evening, a few old women or more energetic children would creep out with jars and pitchers, when there would be amongst the urchins a game of romps, loud laughter, and throwing the water in one another's faces. And before the old curfew-bell* chimed out its reluctant drowsy notes, some of the inhabitants would wake up and bring out chairs, in which they would sit and chat, also somewhat drowsily, for an hour or so, till they obeyed the immemorial bell, and turned in to sleep again.

Even in the great, lofty, bare convent, with its stone or tiled floors and white-washed walls, the heat told heavily on the nuns in their various occupations, and heavy, flowing, woollen habits and veils. No one ever complained, either of the habits or of the heat, but the white faces grew more faded and wan, and the feeble chanting voices more feeble, as July rolled on into August, and the fierce sun seemed to burn up all the air and stop the very pulses of the heart.

The Sisters in the kitchen, however, went on making soup as usual for the sick who sent for it, as well as for a certain number of cripples and maimed, who could do nothing to earn their own bread. And the Sister in the bakehouse, also, plied her hot trade just the same, though Noël often thought she would faint away as she was helping her take out the batch of loaves. For, as Noël told the simple nun, she did

* The curfew hour, if not the bell, is most religiously observed at Aigues Mortes.

not eat enough to keep a sparrow alive; and besides all the usual four abstinence days every week, there were the lengthened Advent, and Lent from Septuagesima Sunday, and extra fasts, which seemed to her to recur without end.

But Sister Placida only smiled her usual contented smile, and told Noël that if they suffered cheerfully in this world, she hoped they should be well refreshed in the next, for which they were all living.

This particular afternoon, during the octave of the Assumption, there was no cooking or baking going on; which was well, for it seemed to Noël the hottest day they had yet had. Perhaps it weighed all the more unendurably upon her, because she had been pining for many weeks for a letter from Leopold, and no letter had come. And Noël, without knowing it, had gone through the whole series of the heart-breaking stanzas of Mariana, and was hourly unconsciously echoing—

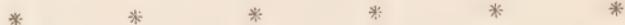
“He cometh not, she said—
I would that I were dead!”

She was sitting now in a little parlour, near the church, finishing drawing out a distaff of fine wool for the Abbess, while she listened to the rising and falling chant of the office, as the nuns were singing Vespers in choir—“Lauda Jerusalem Dominum: lauda Deum tuum, Sion,” they sang. “Qui annuntiat verbum Suum Jacob: justitias et judicia Sua Israel.” And Noël, almost as in a dream, followed the course of the Psalm. Then, after a pause, a lovely young clear voice began

to intone the Little Chapter—that wonderful cry which always seems to be heard for the first time, uttering deep and unspeakable things. “O altitudo divitiarum sapientiae et scientiae Dei, quam incomprehensibilia sunt judicia Ejus, et investigabiles viæ Ejus !”

The well-known, familiar words seemed to flash like an electric light upon Noël’s inner sense, and to stir up and arouse, as with a trumpet call, all her hidden powers of courage and endurance. She sat attent with the distaff in her hand, almost as if waiting to hear to what tasks she should be summoned. Then the heavy gate bell rang, and she saw the portress open the wicket and take in two letters. Throughout the long after years of her life, Noël never lost sight of that moment ; the heavy, deep swing of the bell, the opening of the wicket, the look of the letters handed in, and the cheerful “ Bon soir, Monsieur ! ” of the portress. Disturbed by the bell, three white doves who were picking up grain in the court whirred suddenly up into the air, and settled on the steep crested roof, where they roo-cooed themselves again into a placid state of repose. And just then the *Angelus* rang, and the portress, coming across the court, stopped to say it, and Noël, with her heart beating audibly, said it too.

“ Voici une grande lettre pour vous, chère petite ! ” said the portress, after a while. “ Mais qu’elle est grande et grosse ! Doit y avoir quelque chose dedans ! ”



Half an hour later, a low, hurried knocking was heard by Mère Bauget at her door, and without waiting for the “*Deo gratias!*” it opened, and a pale, half-scared looking figure tottered across the floor, and laid itself at the Abbess’ feet, hiding her head in her lap, and moaning low, like some wounded animal in distress. Much startled and amazed, the Abbess soothed her gently, sought the well-worn cushion of her prayer desk (forced on her by the infirmarian) to lay under Noël’s head, and ringing her little handbell, dispatched the prompt lay sister, that answered the rare call to the infirmary, for some wine and *Eau des Carmes*. Having obliged Noël to swallow some mouthfuls of this mixture, the Abbess went on bathing her head for some time with the diluted *Eau des Carmes*, till a violent hysterical fit revived the girl from her stunned, bewildered state. Then the Abbess sent away the lay sister, but told her to remain within call. She had seen that Noël had, throughout, clutched a crumpled up letter with a firm hold, refusing all efforts to open the hand which held it; and as soon as the door was shut, and Noël was again leaning against her, Mère Bauget said,

“Now, dear little one, tell me all the trouble. You have heard from England, have you not?”

“Oh yes!—at least, I thought so; but I am so bewildered that I can’t tell. It is his writing—it has his name—but, oh! can it be he that——”

“Do not sob so, my dear little child. Had I not

better see the letter? I feared this. He is not true to you, my child. Is it not so?"

Noël still seemed so stunned that she scarcely yet took in the full meaning of her own grief, or of its cause, or of anything that was said to her. She slowly lifted up her head, and fixed her swollen eyes on the Abbess, then as slowly uncrumpled her tightly-clenched hand, and dropped the letter on her lap, laying her head down again on her knees, as if she gave up understanding anything, and only knew that with this Mother there was refuge and safety. Mère Bauget smoothed out the letter, which was of two sheets closely written; but, as the hand was a good and clear one, she got through it without much difficulty. After a great deal of rambling and contradictory introduction—about his father and his reluctance to the marriage, and his money difficulties, and the family grief at the idea of his banishment from England and his family, and his intense disappointment that his father refused him and his future wife a home in the family house, and his own despair, said in many words, which seemed to multiply themselves purposely out of the writer's cowardice—Leopold came to the pith of his letter.

"And so, my own best darling—whom, after to-day, I must no longer call my own—there is but the one course for me and for you to take. We must part, my Noël, and I must bear never again to hear your dear

voice, or look in your sweet face. I wish from my inmost heart you had never seen me at all, and that I could put everything back to the day when I first saw you sitting in the charette at the *musecade*. I can say nothing to you to justify myself, my dearest one, for I have nothing to say ; you must despise me, as I deserve, but I am not man enough to forsake my country, and all my own people, and my hopes in my profession, and go to live in a strange land. I cannot do it, and if I tried it I should only make you and myself miserable. Pray for me sometimes—but no—forget me as soon as you can, and forget all this wretched piece of your wasted life, and forgive me, I implore of you, for all the harm I have done you. Oh, I do hope and pray you may forget me altogether, as if you had never seen me ! Do not send back the ring, but break it up and sell it for the poor, or give it to the altar at Les Stes. Maries. God bless you for ever, my darling Noël !

“ Your half-distracted and utterly miserable

“ LEOPOLD MORLAND.”

“ Miserable, indeed, he may well say !” said the Abbess, laying down the letter. “ That word in it, at least, is true. So much hope is there in a man who has no settled principles or religion ! My darling little one !” continued this true mother, stroking Noël’s bowed-down head with the softest, gentlest touch. “ My darling little one ! I do not think this is the

worst misery that could have befallen you. He could not have made you really happy. You could never have rested on such a foundation of sand. And God has mercifully shown you this truth before it was too late. Look at me, my darling child, and try to sound your own heart, and the truth. Was it not passion, rather than the true love which makes a blessed Christian marriage, that bound you to him ? Did it ever give you rest or peace ?”

Noël shook her head sadly. “ No,” she said faintly, “ but I loved him ! He was so good to me—so kind—so beautiful ! Perhaps it was all wrong—but I loved him. Oh, my God ! what shall I do, never to see him again ! Let me die ! Oh, let me die !”

The Abbess let her moan and plain for a while, like a wounded fawn, soothing her with calm and tender words and caresses, and then her deep, rich voice said again, “ Listen to me, my little child. Was it not put into your heart to come here, away from your home, for some tranquil rest and thought ?”

“ Yes, Mother. I thought of it one Sunday while we were at Mass.”

“ The thought came quietly into your own mind, without any one suggesting it to you ?”

“ No one had said anything about it, Mother, for that purpose. My father had been furiously angry when—when—he wished——”

“ Never mind about that, darling. Your father said, probably, that you should come and be shut up in the

convent, as a threat of punishment, on bread and water?"

"Yes, Mother, that was it; I never thought much about it then, because I know he will threaten anything when he is put out like that. But, the next Sunday, the thought came to myself, and I felt that I wanted a rest for both mind and soul."

"Do you not think God Himself gave you that thought?"

"I suppose so, Mother," said Noël, faintly.

"And there were many more things contained in it, my little one, than you can see yet. You thought of a few days of retreat and leisure to prepare yourself for a change of lot, while God was taking you into the wilderness to speak more specially to your soul, and to make you ready to do more and more work for Him. What this work is I do not yet clearly see myself, but I have the most unquestioning faith that He will lead you on and into it with His own hand, as He has begun the act. Come with me now for a little visit to the church—a very little one, darling, for you are quite worn out. We will just bless God's will together, and thank Him that He has led you so near Himself by the sorrowful road of the cross; and then we will ask Him together to give you light and strength to bear up under it and to go on; and your first act of renewed courage and trust in God shall be to see me destroy this memorial of your past life."

Mère Bauget took up Leopold's letter, and tearing it

down, and across, and into the smallest fragments, she threw them into her waste-paper basket ; and then, putting one still powerful arm round Noël, she lifted her up and made her lean on her with her whole weight till they got into the church.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW NOËL CONDUCTED HERSELF.

A FEW weeks later Paquette and Noël were sitting once more at the convent gates within the courtyard in the little charette with Brunon, and Paquette was holding up the thick white double umbrella to shade them from the sun, as Noël was saying last and still more last words to the nuns and lay sisters who had been allowed to go down to bid her farewell. Every one of them was heartily sorry to part with her, and the lay sisters especially had hoped that they should have seen Noël led into the chapel to make her request to the Mother Abbess as a postulant, and that she would have ended her days as a Benedictine at Aigues Mortes. For some tricklings of the truth had oozed out—as such truths will—about Noël's marriage having been broken off, and what, said they to themselves, could a disappointed earthly bride do better than become the “bride of Heaven”? And they all loved this sweet, gentle Noël so dearly! However, they still cherished a hope that Noël was only waiting for her

grandmother's death, and they therefore cheerfully bade her good-bye and God speed, and urged her to come back to them before long. And Noël looked up once again at the white doves on the high crested roof, and at the fretted arch of the beloved church, and the black flowing habits of the nuns, and their placid faces; and then the groaning old gates opened and closed, and they were in the streets, and Noël felt almost as if she were a nun herself, sent out into her dreary banishment in "the world."

She looked very pale and thin, and there was a languor in her sweet face and large eyes that had never been seen there before ; but she talked cheerfully to her grandmother, and asked questions about her father, and the animals, and all her home things.

They drove out of the massive, almost Cyclopean thickness of the town walls, across the filled-up moat, and through the glorious old covered gateway of the Carbonnière, and were soon scudding over the salt marshes as fast as Brunon could go. For, whereas at times it was hard work to urge him to a very mild trot, the mule knew directly his head was turned homewards, when he would lay his heels well to the ground with the bit in his teeth. The airless, simmering heat was so intense, even at that early hour of half-past four in the morning, that Paquette was glad enough to see the mood Brunon was in. All about them the snow-white salt dew, as it was called, reflected back the sunlight painfully, and the miasma from the

salt swamps and stagnant pools was fetid and unpleasant. But Paquette pulled out of her pocket two round lumps of charcoal, as big as a hazel-nut, and putting one in her own mouth, gave the other to Noël, bidding her keep it under her tongue and be careful not to lose it. They had driven on in this way till about seven o'clock, when Paquette drew up at a little dwarf-oak thicket, remarking that shade was scarce in these parts, and that they had better breakfast there and give Brunon a rest. She unfastened the mule from the cart to give him a better chance, and pulled bread and butter and eggs out of her basket, saying that they must pick up a good meal while they had a little shade over their heads.

When they had breakfasted and harnessed Brunon again, and got out of the thicket and turned their faces towards the plain, they saw a strange and most unwelcome sight. A vast silvery lake, with bluish billowy waters, stretched before them, and between them and it the loveliest succession of wooded villas, churches, and orange-gardens, spreading down towards the lake. A variety of vessels and boats with latteeen sails were sailing on the lake, and every now and then changed the scene by lifting themselves up and sailing about as easily in the air.

"Oh, Granny, the mirage!" cried Noel. "I have never seen such a beautiful one before! Why, look, there is the church at Les Saintes! Surely, we cannot have missed our way?"

"We shall miss it in good earnest if we go taking those devils' churches* for real ones!" replied Paquette. "I am very sorry to see them so early in the day, but I believe Brunon would take us home in spite of all the sorcery in the Camargue;" and Paquette made the sign of the cross, and touched Brunon with the end of the reins. The mule seemed to feel that all his chivalry was put in requisition, and instead of backing and laying down his ears, as he was apt to do at starting, he made a full stop, pointed his ears forward till they met, and then, with a little neigh of sagacious discernment, started off at a long, round trot, straight towards the largest of the fanciful churches in question. As in the nature of the appearances in a *mirage*, it toppled over and passed away like a dissolving view before their approach, and, as Brunon continued to point his ears and investigate occasionally with his nose nearly on the ground, they successively stormed and took all the more salient points of the sham landscape, and made their way in safety in the ferry-boat across the great Canal de Beaucaïre, a little beyond which they were to stay the night at a farmhouse. When they were going to bed, just after saying their prayers, Paquette kissed Noël very affectionately, which she seldom did, and said in a low, choked voice, "May God for ever bless thee, my child! Neither thy father nor

* The mirage of the Camargue is looked upon by the inhabitants, whose belief in, and even practice of, a number of superstitious acts is singularly rooted, as the direct intervention of Satan.

I shall ever say a word about it. But if other folks do not know thy worth, we are heartily glad to have thee at home again!" Before suddenly extinguishing the candle, and herself under the bedclothes, Paquette had thus spoken her first and last word to Noël about her broken engagement.

The next evening they reached Cabridelle, and Noel took up once more her old, common home life. But not as she had done before; for her grandmother now left most of the household matters entirely in her hands, and her father continually made some excuse or errand for taking her out with him, and bought her a new little cart and a snow-white pony for her to drive herself out, saying that now he was getting old he liked her to take the reins and save him the trouble. He even trained a Passion flower and Gloire di Dijon rose round her own chamber window, and laid down the whole space before the house in flowers and sweet herbs for the use of her bees, and contrived a pretty shed of canes over the spring, that she might be sheltered from the sun and driving winds when she went for water or to wash her cheese bowls. In short, Nicole Privas seemed to have grown as tender and watchful as a mother for Noël's sake, and sought in every way he could invent to show his love and sympathy and joy at having her again at home. But, grateful and loving to him as she was, it was hard work for Noël. In the first place, like all people who have once passed through great emotions, she had

become refined and elevated by them, and felt that she no longer stood even on the same level as formerly with regard to her father and grandmother. She had always felt some unconscious separation, but it had widened tenfold since her acquaintance with Leopold Morland, and then, as the Arabs say, “the flower which has once unfolded to the sun can never again fold itself up into a bud.”

Noël scolded herself also often for the distaste, but she could not take up again her old interest in her work. The care of the animals and fowls and silk-worms, and even the bees, which she had formerly so loved to watch, seemed now wearisome tasks which weighed upon her, instead of the interests of her daily life. And, worst of all, the haunts which had become strongly associated with Leopold were all now so alive with pain, that she could, at times, scarcely refrain from crying out aloud as she passed them by, or was obliged to frequent them in her daily work. The spring, where he had lain at full length on the grass to watch her washing her dairy utensils; the mulberry trees, where she had sung to him her quaint old ballads; the orchard, where she had heard his first real, actual words of love, and where he had put his mother’s ring on her finger;—all these—and the upper floor, where she had sat to him so many days as his model for Jeanne d’Arc, and where he or Nasmyth had recounted the circumstances of the Maid’s beautiful life—now seemed whole armouries of cruel weapons

and instruments of torture, by which she was racked and pierced with daily anguish. Had it not been for Mère Bauget's words, and her frequent, short, strengthening letters, and Noël's own conviction that the roots of passion must be slowly plucked up and cast into the fire, she could never have outlived the weary months that dragged themselves away as if they never would end.

During that time a rich shopkeeper of Aigues Mortes, a good and clever man, who filled one of the chief municipal posts in his native town, came all the way across the Camargue to Cabridelle, to ask Noël to be his wife. For he had seen her several times at the parish church, and had never before thought of any woman enough to wish to take a wife.

Privas and his mother were touched by his respectful devotion and modest pleading, that he might be allowed some time, any time she liked to name, as his probation, if only he might be allowed to hope. But no pleading or urgency of his affection could induce Noël to listen to him for a moment herself. Her eyes flashed in the old, long-forgotten way, her lips quivered, and her whole slight frame trembled with excitement, as she said to her father, "Never again, father! Do not ask me; do not speak to me of loving any man! I am sorry for him and thank him, and respect him; but I will never see him or any one on that errand as long as I live!"

And as long as he stayed—for Privas was obliged

to keep him for the night—Noël never left her room, even for meals, nor till she saw the charette lessening on the plain did she lose her feverish, restless irritability of look and voice and manner.

It was the last time either her father or grandmother ever spoke to her of loving or marrying any man.

During the next year her kind, strong-hearted old grandmother died, and not long after that, by one of those strange capricious acts to which men are given when they have been subjected to any great sorrow, Privas suddenly married again, marrying, too, a young woman who was only a few years older than his daughter; and then Noël's heart bounded for the first time since her loss, with a feeling of something like joy, for she was free.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TWO MARRIAGES.

THERE was a great stir and excitement in the not very stirring regions of Montagu Square—much coming and going all the morning : mysterious covered baskets and dishes appearing, conveyed by gentlemen in white aprons ; flowers, servants, and helpers ; chairs, tables, and benches. A line of butchers' boys, bakers, hand-carts, and the general more do-nothing driftwood, the current of which mysteriously sets in, no one knows whence, on the springing up of any event, stood on tip-toe outside the area-railings, peeping at as much as could be seen of the inside dining-room splendour, and nudging and reporting of it to each other, with “Oh, my!” and “Did you ever?” and “I say, look at the cakes! Two on 'em at onst!” And undoubtedly the tops of two wedding-cakes, wreathed with flowers, and decorated with pretty figures, were there to be seen, as well as the upper summits of pyramidal Gunterian-seeming pies, vases, flowerpots, *comportes* of fruit, and other such varieties.

And there was really going to be a double marriage from this same house in the square ; and while the butchers and bakers and candlestick-makers were looking over the railing, two several brides were being adorned in their several rooms.

Anne Morland and Car Chetwynd, to wit. For, in spite of Anne's great, and, if possible, Nasmyth's greater, repugnance to Leopold's conduct, and their mutual dislike of the wiles of his beautiful bride, they could not make, or keep up, dissension in the family home ; nor could Anne, without doing violence to herself and her principles as a daughter, stand out against her father's strong wish that his son and daughter should be married from his house on the same day. Nay, moreover, as Leopold was his eldest son, his marriage was to be the first celebrated, while Anne's would play only second fiddle. That is, Leopold, whose attention to his father had been little, whose obedience to his feeling and wishes of the least, and whose conduct had been poor, untrustworthy, and unfaithful, was to be feted and honoured, and, in Mrs. Grundy's eyes, to shine as the conquering hero, for whom a triumphant banquet had been prepared ; while Anne, whose whole life had been so devoted to her father that her health even had suffered, when, as a young girl, the responsibility of the house-keeping, and ordering, and managing, when means were not so plentiful, had weighed upon her bodily strength and nerves—Anne, whose conduct had been in all points

beyond praise, and who was crowned with the unseen marriage-wreath of the good daughter's promised blessing, must stand back in a secondary place, and be with her noble husband, as it were, but the accessories to her unworthy brother and his bride.

Anne was too real, and true, and clear-minded not to know that this was the case ; but then, also, neither she nor Harry cared for the outside of life and the world. She shrank, too, from any very keen analysis of standards and principles which must influence her judgment of her father, as well as of Leopold ; and she wisely resolved to consent to this outward conformity to her father's wishes, and to keep the peace in all external things with Car, while nothing should ever tempt her to put her husband or her children within reach of her conduct and wiles. These, which were very unlike most bridal thoughts, Anne was just now fastening into her mind, with the flowers, and veil, and wreath which Janet and the lady's maid, and Mrs. Stone, their old nurse, who had come to see the last of her darling Miss Morland, were arranging upon her head.

" What makes you so grave, Miss Anne ? Look up at me. Ah ! there's your own smile, and your mamma's. There's nothing wrong when you can smile like that, Miss Anne. Bless your dear heart ! you was always as good as gold ! "

" So she was, Nursey," said Janet ; " and as good as fine gold her husband will find her !" She added, *sotto voce*, in Anne's ear, as Mrs. Stone went off for some

sash or pins, “I wish I could think or say as much for our precious cousin !”

“Hush, darling Jeanie ! Don’t breathe a word of such treason ! Mind, my own one, you are to be papa’s comfort, as well as his right hand, and you must not contradict him. ‘Let sleeping dogs lie, and they won’t bark at you !’ Only do *you* go straight and truly, my own sisterling !”

“Now, Miss Janet, my dearie, do let me put on her sash,” said Mrs. Stone, who had waited respectfully in the background thus far. “They will be coming for her directly, and I should like *our* bride to be the first dressed ; and then, as the saying is, she’ll always be ready either for life or death. And you’ll excuse me, I know, my dears, for mentioning death on such a joyful day as this ; but you’ll remember, I stood in your mother’s place, a’most, when that dear saint died ; and death will come to us all, even to you beautiful young brides in your time, and you must be ready, my dears.”

“Thank you, darling Nursey !” exclaimed Anne, warmly, throwing her arms round the old woman’s neck, as thorough a lady in all her thoughts and ways as ever went to court. “Thank you, and God bless you, darling, for all your good words and teaching. We should have been badly off, Nursey, but for you. And mind, Nursey, you must come into the vestry *very* quickly afterwards, because you are to have my first married kiss next to my own.”

Here a hurried knocking was heard at the door, and Stone himself, in the fullest funereal attire, was there breathless, to beg of Miss Morland to come down at once. He exchanged the deepest admiring glances with his wife, and followed the sweeping white robes on which, perhaps, the wearer bestowed fewer thoughts than any bride had ever done before.

The carriages were soon packed, and not long afterwards the church. Everybody's eyes were then instantly riveted on Car. "Beautiful! How beautiful!" audibly ran through the crowd of well-dressed spectators; for the whole Academy was there, to say nothing of all their friends and relations, and, as the fairy tales say, "everybody else besides." Beautiful, indeed, was Car, as a picture to the outward eye. She was dressed exceptionally, too, as she always was—in one long, sweeping robe of rich, dead-white silk, without a flounce, or puffing, or flower upon its heavy, thick-falling folds. It was made high, cut square, with long sleeves, and on the shoulders were aigrettes with one large pearl. Her long, cloudlike, soft veil, falling from head to foot, shrouded her like thin mist, and was kept in place by a simple ring of pearls, with just one sprig of real orange flowers in front. As she raised her pale face and deep fringed eyes, with her lovely mouth opened a little, when Leopold took his place beside her, perhaps nothing had ever been seen so faultlessly beautiful.

So Leopold thought, in a kind of intoxicated dream.

Nasmyth, standing quietly behind, was thinking of another face, which perhaps hindered his full appreciation of the beauty of this special one before him. His mind had flown back to a girl's clear, innocent eyes, and pure brow, as she was singing at a spring, washing her milk-bowls and jars. He saw the same figure gathering leaves in a gold-fruited orchard, also singing as she gathered ; and his eyes actually filled with unwonted tears as he thought of Noël, deserted, and abandoned, and suffering so far away, while Leopold seemed to have forgotten her as much as if she had been "a dream that is told." So completely absorbed was he with these thoughts, that when the clergyman paused, and he should have gone forward, Nasmyth actually started at the touch of his faithful "best man." He came back quickly enough to the present, when he saw Anne standing at his side, and if anything could have deepened the sense of his resolve to love and cherish her truly for life and unto death, and for ever beyond, it was his flight of thought to Cabridelle.

I cannot follow in detail, as I could wish, the fortunes of Anne and Harry Nasmyth. He took her abroad for a while, as he had business which required his personal overlooking in Italy and Southern Germany. He was afterwards employed in Algeria, and then in Egypt, where wealth flowed in upon him, and Nasmyth's fortune was made. After a few years they returned to London, where they bought land and built a charming house at Highgate, which became a kind of central point

for a large circle of "good-doers." There was no restriction of any kind as to the limits of this circle, except that no vulgarity of lion-showing or lion-hunting was allowed to find an entrance there. One celebrity often met there another celebrity, it is true—not because they were celebrated, but because they both, in different ways, were striving to promote the same end. The quaker lady, whose life was spent in conducting emigrants to Canada, there met the nobleman whose means and powerful influence had first started her plans or helped her to carry them out. Women-doctors, struggling against the narrowness of conventional class-barriers and the bitterness of selfish hate, met physicians there, and ended by reconciling all their differences, and becoming convinced that, as no truth can destroy another truth, so no really good work can ever injure another. And besides thus furnishing a nucleus for intelligent intercourse in their own society, the Nasmyths extensively promoted and originated meetings and discussion among working men, which stirred up greater intelligence and breadth of action between masters and labourers, and made the influence of principle and fair dealing widely felt. And as Harry's great engineering works had made his name known throughout and beyond Europe, he was able to set on foot an extended and well-considered stream of emigration to prepared localities, which opened new homes and prosperity to many hundreds of his countrymen, who otherwise would have starved, or

sunk into pauperism, or been branded with crime at home.

None of us would probably care to linger over Leopold Morland's career. It might, perhaps, be expected, in the natural course of events, that some poetical or other justice should have befallen him, which would have pointed this tale with more of a moral than it has.

I have not, for my own part, found such morals always ready pointed in actual life. On the contrary, the wicked and the guiltily weak are still to be found—as in the Psalms—flourishing like the greenest of bay-trees. Leopold Morland, in fact, as I can but record the truth, amply fulfilled his father's prognostics, and far outstripped him in his successful work and renown. He fell into the way of painting a kind of character portraits, which required little intellectual labour, and no elevation of thought, and for which he obtained almost fantastic sums. In the course of time he was chosen, chiefly upon the fame of these portraits, President of the Academy, and as Sir Leopold Morland attracted high-born crowds to his dinners, and soirées, and breakfast fêtes, in the organization of which his beautiful wife showed her singular talent. It is true that Lady Morland, who never has had any children, is much censured and talked about as an incorrigible and daring flirt; but, as she has gone on flirting and being censured for some years, she will, probably, never run entirely off the line. My own opinion is

that, much as she likes to amuse herself in her usual heartless way, she is much too fond of her present position, and all the comforts of her home and life, to run the risk of forfeiting them by any rashness of folly.

Upon both these characters the curtain may be allowed to drop.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HOSPICE SALOMÉ.

NOËL was free ; but how did she use her freedom ? Did she fly back to the old convent at Aigues Mortes, and rejoice the heart of dear Mère Bauget by at length kneeling before the community in the Chapter Room, and demanding the postulant's privileges, as the introductory entry into the Benedictine Order ?

No ; there is no record of her name to be found in the thick, yellow parchment register of that peaceful old nunnery. The groaning gates never rolled back to admit her as an inmate, nor did she ever trail her long, straight habit through the dove-haunted, moss-grown courtyard. Yet she was in the convent, many a time, before Mère Bauget died.

Various thoughts had stirred in Noël's brain since the time when the fiery anguish she had passed through had nearly thrown it off its balance. Her own deep burning sorrows and the passionate grief and indignation they had aroused, and the unhealed wounds which time had only skinned over, had, in

the end, awakened in her loving heart the most intense desire to devote herself in some way to all the sorrowful and suffering she could reach ; and especially the sorrowful. She resolved, therefore, to settle herself at Les Stes. Maries, where so great a number of the afflicted of all kinds resorted, and to devote herself first to the care and soothing of the pilgrims in general, and then more specially to those unhealed, who must go empty away, not having been allowed even the crumbs which fell from the children's table. Noël began by asking her father for nearly the portion she would have had if she had married ; and, almost to her own surprise, she obtained it from him. Of his own accord Privas also made over to her all that had been her mother's dowry, so that Noël, as a Provençale, was set up as quite a rich heiress, and felt more and more convinced that the way had been marked out for the work to be done.

She went, therefore, to Les Stes. Maries, and with the help of an old lawyer, a sort of cousin of her father's, sought out and found an old, rambling house, which had probably been some kind of convent before the League wars, but of which all record had long been lost. This house was much battered and out of order, but was so thickly and solidly built, that it needed no substantial or expensive repairs. After some haggling and difficulties it was bought, and Noël took possession of it before one approaching May Feast. She had laid out a certain sum in iron bed-

steads, with plain, useful bedding, benches, tables, and crockery; and when the poor maimed cripples, and blind, and sick, began to fill the town, Noël went out among them, and invited those whom she thought the most desolate and afflicted to come and lodge in her house.

By a wise instinct, and as if guided in all her acts, she avoided those touched with the fearful southern leprosy,* which is infectious, and the bad fever cases, but she brought in several lame people, two blind women, and some sick children, for whom her heart ached in their helpless misery.

She cooked and prepared the simple food for her little flock, and found handy assistance from one of the lame women, who could work while sitting down. Noël talked to them sweetly and simply during the meals, and asked them to promise not to blaspheme or use any bad language, and to say some little short prayer, at their own choice, whenever the old chiming church clock struck. The poor, friendless people readily agreed to her little rules, and looked upon her almost as an angel come down to help them in their sore afflictions. Instead of sleeping on the sand, in all the dirt of their long journey, and without change of clothes, they found large pans of water provided to

* Leprosy, traditionally said to have been introduced by the crusaders from the Holy Land, is certainly known in Provence and the Riviera. There is a Leper's Hospital at San Remo, which at this moment contains forty lepers.

wash themselves, and then were helped into their clean and fresh, though coarse, beds. Having enjoyed such complete rest, therefore, Noël's little troop were the first in the church, the first to touch the shrines; and this time every one of those she had housed went home cured.

But there were many others, unhealed, among whom Noël went up and down like a ministering spirit, taking as many of them into her house as she could, and bearing gently with all their blasphemous words and passionate southern fury and disgust at not being cured. She called to mind all her little learning and knowledge, spoke to them of all she knew of Christ's words and acts, and His pity and mercy, and convinced many of these poor creatures that it was their own evil state and want of sorrow for sin that was hardening their hearts, and preventing them from receiving any favours or benefit. Some of the incurables Noël established at once permanently in her house, only begging of them to behave well, and not wilfully to break any of the commandments. Thus the good work to which she had given herself was well and solidly begun.

There were other moments, besides the time she gave to the Salomé Hospice—so the Saintins called Noël's old house, and it had an image of Mary of Salomé put over the door—when she wandered away down the little dark troughs of side-streets and courts of the town, to find out still sadder cases than she

could receive under her own roof. It was seldom that girls went astray and were quite lost at Les Stes. Maries, but sometimes a terrible case here and there might be found, when shame and despair—where such things were little known and held in horror—generally ended in some sort of madness, or chronic harmless wandering of the brain. These poor girls Noël would carefully seek out, and pour out her whole heart in comforting and leading them to some sense of real penitence, and return to their ordinary duties. Their poor little misborn children she generally took home to the Hospice, where in time she took in two strong, good old women to help her, who had been cured at one of the May Feasts.

No voice was ever raised among the Saintins—to their honour be it spoken—to object to any of Noël's charitable acts, either for the acts themselves, or because they were incongruous with other of her previous good works. They never said that they thought the Hospice was exclusively for any purpose; either for old women, or crippled men, or children. They accepted it with thankful joy just as it was, a sort of Hotel Dieu, in its true sense, where any poor soul in need of a shelter at the time, and not in a state dangerous to others, might be taken in for wine and oil to be poured in its wounds; if it was necessary, to stay there for life; if not, for a time, and then to be helped and speeded on its way.

It was God's work, they thought, and for God's poor

afflicted, and *La Sainte* could do exactly what it was put into her mind to do.

It was worth while to see "La Sainte"—as now Noël was secretly called among the townsfolk—at her day's work. All the inmates of the Hospice, who were not absolutely bedridden, got up at five o'clock, and went to the church to hear Mass. If there were any bedridden, the two old women, Sœur Martha and Sœur Marie Jacques, took it in turns to stay at home and take care of them, and that one meanwhile said morning prayers, and lit the marmite to prepare the breakfast.

When everybody had returned to the Hospice, Noël rang the bell, and all who possibly could, little and big, gathered in the hall and sat down to the clean but coarsely-covered long table, where soup and bread-and-milk, steaming hot, were served to them. After grace was said, Noël talked to them all, or rather heard what they had to say to her, attending to each in her simple, kindly way, leading them to what was right, instead of putting them straight with authority. After breakfast, they went into another large, clean room, where those who could not take part in the morning cooking and house-work, had various means of useful occupation. There were distaffs, and sewing, and knitting, and palm-splitting for the women, and carving and basket or mat making for the men. Many a hundred of palm-leaf baskets were sold for their support, and the little olive-wood and Aleppo pine articles which

they learnt to make became quite a staple trade in the town. At some time in the morning, just when it happened to be most convenient, the rosary was said, and if any one or two liked it, and no one objected, some pious old songs were sung. At noon the *Angelus* was said to the deep voice of the old church bell, and directly afterwards, everybody gathered again in the hall for dinner. At dinner there was soup of a more nourishing sort than in the morning, sometimes meat, vegetables, and salad, and messes of polenta, or rice, or lentils with oil. Coarse bread was allowed to all at will ; it was heaped up in great hunches on vast round wooden dishes in the middle of the table. The drink, of course, was the wine of the neighbourhood, a very poor, thin kind ; but those who liked it better, and they were many, had goats' milk.

After dinner there was a short sleep, and some of the very helpless generally slept away a good part of the afternoon. Those who liked went out to the church, or to sun themselves on the sands in front of the church, tasting the sea breeze, or to sit in the shade of the tamarisks and big walls, as the weather might be. Each one made a little visit to the church in the afternoon, as a rule, and there were some who spent there the whole of their spare time. At five o'clock came supper, and after supper more work was done till darkness set in, when most of the poor cripples went to bed with the birds. When all but the most helpful were settled for the night, Noël would say

prayers for all in the large divided sleeping-room, and then went out to the Church herself, where she often remained till quite late, absorbed in prayer, and so still, that you could scarcely believe she was alive. In the solemn gloom of that dim old Church, before the three red lamps where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved, Noël learnt to lay down the heavy burthens of her life, and take up strength to go on. When her loneliness and utter isolation from all sympathetic companionship, and the dreary stretching out of days which seems so endless to those who sustain any great shock or sorrow in youth, and the monotonous prospect of loneliness through all her life and her old age seemed too heavy to bear, then Noël would kneel hour after hour before that altar, wrestling for the needful strength to struggle on in the race, the lists, the hand-to-hand battle of life.

And not a day passed by that she did not go to pray beside Lambert's grave, whose life, as she felt, had been given for her, and while praying and weeping there, and hanging some little simple fresh wreath daily on his stone cross, Noël felt that she was forgiven, and that that noble soul was surely helping her now, though they had been severed with so much bitterness on earth.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

L'ENVOI.

ONE afternoon, in early spring, when she had been at Les Stes. Maries about five years, Noël was just hanging her little narcissus wreath on Rambert's grave cross, when she saw two persons come out of the Church, and, after looking about them for a few moments, walk quickly towards her—a lady and a gentleman—and her heart gave a quick throb with the mingling of many recollections, as she recognized Harry Nasmyth's familiar outlines and voice. He came forward, with outstretched hand, to the slender, grey-clad figure, and said, “Here you are at last ! we have been seeking you everywhere. My wife wants to know you so much, that she could not be content to go back to England till I had brought her here.”

Anne stepped forward, and warmly clasped her hand. “You are Noël, I am sure ?”

“I am Noël Privas, yes.”

“I was afraid that it might be painful to you, Mdlle. Privas, to see us,” Nasmyth went on, in the old, deep,

kind voice which Noël knew, oh ! how well ; “ but I thought, if we could but once meet, that you would be sure to love my wife, as she has long loved you, and that whenever you were in want of a friend she would be there then for you to come to.”

He was walking on slowly through the cemetery as he spoke, and Anne followed at a little distance behind.

“ I wrote to your father,” Nasmyth went on, “ and he told me where you were, and what you were doing : at least in part, but I hope you will take us through the Hospice—the Salomé, is it not ?”

“ Yes, sir, we have dedicated it to one of the three Marys, which, you know, are specially our saints here. You have been in the church, I think ?”

Without waiting for his answer, Noël then dropped her voice very low, and said, “ Is that lady—your wife —Anne ?”

Nasmyth assented, and, not wishing to stir up too many associations, he then made room for his wife between himself and Noël, and they went on talking to her about her poor incurables, till they came to the Hospice door, where, after seeing the arrangements, Nasmyth left his wife in Noël’s charge, and went back to the little inn to order some conveyance for the next day. He wisely judged that both the women were of the stamp soon to recognize each other’s worth, and to draw together in their own way. He was not mistaken. As soon as she had come into Noël’s

room, Anne threw down her hat and cloak, and putting her arms round Noël, kissed her affectionately, and said, with tears in her eyes, ‘Oh, Noël, my own real sister ! How long the years have been till I might tell you how I love you ! You must forgive us ; you must say that you will love me and Harry !’

Noël struggled bravely not to lose her calm. She was much touched by Anne’s words, and deeply moved by the meeting, but her character had been so thoroughly tempered and purified, that nothing now could trouble her inner repose. “My sister ?” she murmured, in her sweet, touching voice ; “yes, you shall be always my sister, and my friend. But do not talk to me of any others, nor of the past. I have buried my dead ; let them not rise up again to scare me !”

“The dead shall rest in their graves, dearest Noël ; we will speak only of the present time. But I want you to think of coming, some time or other, to see us in England. Not yet, if you dislike it very much, but some time. Or, if you will not do that, to come to us in Paris, where you can see hospitals and prisons, and every kind of good and useful work, and beautiful Churches, above all, which I know you would love. We would come to Paris any time on purpose, if you will but say Yes. I want you to see my two boys, Noël, that you may pray for them. They are both just like my husband, and I cannot say how happy that makes me. The eldest is Harry, and the little one

Paul, after my husband's father. And I should like you to see our home, and to know all the good my husband is doing in London. Do you know, he says he learnt so much from you, and I can well believe it now I have looked at you, my own sweet, sweet sister!"

Anne had talked on, seeing how deeply Noël had been moved, and seeing also in her beautiful unconscious face the response of pleasure and interest in everything she was saying. But at her last words Noël's pale cheek very slightly tinged, and springing away, she said, "Ah, no, no! you must not say those things to me! They are not the least true; but they might do me some harm. I have always been only a poor, failing, mistaken girl, who never was likely to do anybody any good. But I believe your husband *did* get good from coming among our people and seeing their ways, and—and—I think also—he went to our Feast once here in the Church, and believed what he saw. *That* would certainly do him good."

"It did," replied Anne in a low voice. "He has often talked to me about it, and he wished to be here this next May for it again; but the heat is too great for me to bear, and we are going back directly to England. But we have seen *you*, sister, and that has made my heart glad."

"You will come again," said Noël, fixing her beautiful, clear eyes upon Anne. "I do not think that I see your face now for the last time."

"You are a true prophet, I hope," said Nasmyth's strong, pleasant voice, as he came in behind them. "If it cannot be anywhere else, it shall be here; but I hope—and it has long been one of my most earnest wishes—that you will come back with us some day to stay with us in England."

"Do not ask her to promise that now, Harry. She will come to us *if she can*. If not, we shall come back to Les Stes. Maries and see our sister again."

The two women kissed one another several times before Nasmyth declared that he must take his wife away, and then Noël went with them to the door, and watched them as they walked down the old, narrow, picture-like street towards the inn.

It was an evening and a sunset never to forget. Looking seaward there was the vast hyacinth-blue Mediterranean, across which lay a broad glory from the sun, now sinking into rosy clouds which radiated like a wheel through the opal sky; landward stretched the wide plain of the wild, desolate Camargue with its giant reeds and canes. A long lessening wedge of wild ducks was drawn distinctly across the clear, transparent blue of the horizon. The distant cry of the birds in the marsh-pools and the faint ripple of the sea against the old yellow walls were the only sounds to be heard.

Then the *Angelus* rang from the church. Nasmyth and Anne looked back and waved their hands to Noël. She was still there, in her flowing grey gown and little

white cap, under which her thick coils of hair were tucked away, and which seemed to make her pure eyes and calm, pathetic face lovelier than ever. And over the deep archway, in the gloom of which she was standing, was the image of Mary of Salomé, with its tiny lamp, in a little shrine. Then they turned the corner of the street, and saw her no more.

THE END.

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CAXTON WORKS.

